



The Cousin from India

Georgiana Marion Craik



I BURIED A LITTLE BLACK BOY SO ONCE

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THE
COUSIN FROM INDIA.

A Story for Girls.

BY
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ILLUSTRATIONS.



‘I BURIED A LITTLE BLACK BOY SO ONCE’ . . . *Frontispiece*

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THE
COUSIN FROM INDIA.

CHAPTER I.

‘ H!’

It was such a great ‘OH!’ that I can only give you an idea of it by printing it so, in capital letters. It came from all the three children at once; from Harry, and Meg, and little Davie; and it was succeeded immediately by a general clapping of all their six hands. Harry, as the eldest, and therefore as the one entitled to lead public opinion, began to clap his first, and his example was instantly followed by Meg, who always did what Harry did, as far as she was permitted, and sometimes a good deal farther; and then, of course, Davie struck in too, for, though he

was only a little fellow, you may believe that he did not like to be behind the others ; and no sooner had they all finished clapping than they broke out into quite a volley of questions.

‘Why is she coming, Mother?’ cried Harry.

‘Will she come to stay for good?’ asked Meg.

‘When will she come? Is she on the sea now?’ demanded little David.

‘Yes, Davie, she is on the sea now, I hope,’ their mother, Mrs. Leighton, answered. ‘She is coming, Harry, because little English children can’t live in the hot Indian climate. As to her staying for good, Meg, that will depend upon several things that are not settled yet.’

‘But at any rate she will stay for a good long time, won’t she?’ cried Meg. ‘O how nice it will be ! O I am so glad !’ And then Meg began to dance. Meg always danced when she was glad.

‘It will be very funny to have another girl in the house,’ said Harry thoughtfully.

‘Funny ! it will be delightful !’ cried Meg with enthusiasm.

‘Yes, if she’s nice,’ said Harry.

‘Oh! she’s sure to be nice,’ cried Meg.

‘I don’t know that,’ said Harry prudently.

Harry had been a little carried away at first, as even the wisest of us will be occasionally, by the general enthusiasm, but he was beginning now to feel the wisdom of a little more reserve and caution.

‘I don’t know that,’ said Harry. ‘Girls are not always nice.’

‘Oh, Harry!’ cried Meg, stopping her dancing in distress.

‘Well, but they’re not!’ repeated Harry with firmness.

‘Not when they are our own cousins?’ cried Meg.

‘I don’t see that that makes any difference,’ said Harry.

‘Oh!’ ejaculated Meg, and looked quite shocked, till the mother put her hand upon her little daughter’s shoulder and laughed.

‘It does make a little difference, Meg,’ she said; ‘but not so great a one as you think. I have heard of a good many cousins before now who did not care much about one another; but still, I hope that when Effie comes Harry will like her,’ she said, ‘and I think her being

your cousin ought to make you all *want* to like her. Don't you think so, Harry ?'

Upon which Harry (being a kind-hearted lad, but, like most other lads, not fond of talking about his feelings) answered bluntly, 'Oh, I daresay I shall like her very well;' and then thought that the subject had been pursued quite far enough. Looking about him, accordingly, and being of a quick and versatile disposition, he all at once caused a brilliant diversion by making a swift and unprovoked assault upon his brother David, who, being quite unprepared for the attack, went over before it like a ninepin; having accomplished which manœuvre with great skill, Harry got astride upon him, triumphant.

This little skirmish proved highly successful in accomplishing the end Harry had in view. Little Davie roared so lustily that even Meg for a few minutes forgot her cousin's coming, and before peace was restored the bell rang for dinner, and all the children, springing to their feet, ran off to take their places in the dining-room.

CHAPTER II.

IT was a whole month after this before Effie really came, and when she did appear at last she was the smallest and neatest and demurest-looking little damsel that any of the children had ever seen. When the time drew near for her arrival, their father went to Southampton to meet the ship that was to bring her, and from the hour that he set off you may fancy, if you can, the excitement that there was in the house. The trying part of it was, you see, that, though it was delightful to think he had actually gone to meet her, yet it was impossible to say exactly when he would return home again. He might come on Friday night, or he might come on Saturday night, or he might not come, perhaps, till Sunday morning. It was quite impossible to tell; and just think what it must have been to have to wait in a state of suspense for,

twenty-four, or for thirty-six, or *possibly* for eight-and-forty whole hours ! When her father went away Meg did not know how she was ever to bear it at all.

Of the three children, Harry, as was to be expected, took the matter most stoically, for Harry had lived in the world at this time for not far from twelve long years ; and of course, at such a mature age as twelve, it does not do not to have acquired a good deal of command over one's feelings. Besides, being a boy, he felt that it did not become his dignity to be too much excited over the arrival of a little girl cousin ; so he affected rather to look down upon Meg, who, to tell the truth, had quite lost head before it came to the end, and was really, during the last hours of suspense, not fit to take care of herself. For Meg had never had a cousin to stay with her before, and had never had a sister, nor scarcely any playfellows, because they lived in a very quiet country place, where there were very few houses, and very few children with whom she could make friends—either little girls or little boys. Harry and David were to some extent companions for one another, but Meg had never had a companion at all.

‘Oh, I *wonder* if they will come this morning!’ Meg began to exclaim, as soon as she was awake on the day after her father went. And then it was: ‘I wonder if they will come before evening!’ ‘I wonder if they will come before bedtime!’ over and over again, till Harry, though he was secretly burning for their arrival himself, got quite exasperated at last, and expressed the severest opinion of the way in which Meg was conducting herself.

‘You’re enough to wear out anybody’s temper! I declare you go on just like a big baby!’ cried Harry, with withering contempt.

Upon which Meg, cut to the heart, melted into tears, and went to bed an hour afterwards quite depressed in her mind. For Meg was almost nine years old, and to be accused of behaving like a baby when one has reached such an age as nine is about as bitter a humiliation as can be conceived.

However, the sun was shining next morning when Meg awoke again, and he looked so bright and gay and merry as he came into her room, and threw upon her pillow the shadow of the rose-tree leaves that grew round her window, that Meg sprang joyously out of bed, and began

to dance about the floor, without so much as ever once remembering that she had had a trouble over night.

Here was another day beginning, and surely Effie *would* come to-day ! But all the morning passed, and Effie did not come ; all the afternoon, and not a sign of her ; and it had got to be evening once more, and the tea-tray was already on the table, and the mother was busy cutting bread-and-butter, when suddenly there came a shout from the children watching at the window, and a fly drove up to the door and stopped. It was Effie at last !

They all rushed out to meet her, and as she was lifted from her seat and placed on the ground all their three pairs of eyes stared at her, as if they had never seen a little girl before. For four whole weeks they had been wondering what she would be like, and now here at last she was ! Here she actually was—the smallest creature for nine years old that they had ever seen in all their lives ! She was so small that Meg cried ‘Oh, mamma !’ below her breath, almost awe-struck ; and even Harry looked dismayed ; for, you see, they knew her age to a day—she was just two months and sixteen days younger than Meg was,—and when you meet a lady of nine years old you

expect her to *look* as if she was nine, and not to confound you by appearing as if she was six, and small even for that.

There was clearly, however, no help for it, so, with one great gulp, Meg swallowed her amazement, and, resolving to make the best of it, resigned herself to the happiness of the moment.

‘Oh, I thought you would never come!’ she cried; and then she threw her arms round Effie’s neck, and kissed her, and executed a triumphal dance about her.

‘Yes, Meg has been terribly impatient to see you,’ Mrs. Leighton said; ‘and so have they all. This is your eldest cousin, Harry; and this is David. And now, Meg, take Effie upstairs.’

On which Meg caught her cousin’s hand, and swept her upstairs in a whirl of delight.

Effie herself had never uttered a word yet; she had only looked about her with a pair of big black eyes, which, if Meg had been less excited, would almost have frightened her, for they were so very large, while everything else about her was so very small; but not a single syllable had she said. Meg herself,

however, was chattering away just as water runs out of a jug.

‘Oh, I am so glad! We have been thinking of you for weeks and weeks. You are to sleep in my room, and we have got two little beds. Can you dress yourself in the morning? I can, almost. Here we are now. That is mamma’s room over there, and this is ours. Isn’t it pretty?’ cried Meg, beaming with content, and standing still at last to watch the first effect of the sight on Effie, for Meg believed that this little room of hers was one of the prettiest rooms that ever had been seen. She was so sure of it, and so sure that her cousin must like it too, that when Effie made no answer to her first question (merely looking all round her in perfect silence instead of answering), she rapturously asked it a second time.

‘*Isn’t* it pretty?’ she said.

And then, what do you think Effie replied? In a clear, cold, distinct voice, she slowly said—

‘I think it’s a horrid little hole.’

You might have knocked Meg down with a feather. If she could have thought she had not heard rightly she gladly would, but that was not possible, so she could

only say: 'Oh !' with a little gasp of distress, and then stare at her cousin in mute consternation, with her eyes growing almost as large as Effie's were.

'I like a room that's six times as big,' said Effie, deliberately.

'But we haven't got *any* rooms six times as big as this,' answered poor Meg, quite aghast.

'We have at home,' said Effie; 'there are no such things as small rooms there.'

'Dear me, are there not?' asked Meg, humble and bewildered.

'They are all big rooms, with punkahs in them,' said Effie.

'With *what* in them?' asked Meg, below her breath.

'Punkahs,' repeated Effie shortly.

'O—h !' said Meg hesitating.

A punkah, you know, is a contrivance used in Indian houses for fanning the air and keeping it cool, but Meg had not the slightest idea of that.

'And lots of servants ; dozens of them,' said Effie.

And then Meg, quite quenched and humiliated, sank down upon a chair, and had not the heart to utter

another syllable, until Effie had taken off her hat and cloak, and smoothed down her hair demurely with the very smallest pair of hands you ever saw, when she ventured to say timidly : ' Are you ready now ? ' and on Effie answering ' Yes, ' she took her downstairs again, quite crestfallen.

It was a sad beginning to the pleasure she had so looked forward to, and poor Meg did not know what to make of it at all. She looked so woe-begone, and sighed so deeply as she took her place with the others round the tea-table, that the mother wondered what had happened to her little girl. Perhaps she was disappointed because Effie was so quiet, she thought ; she little imagined that poor Meg was in distress because Effie had said such dreadful things. Nobody all the evening could have imagined that, for during the next three hours Effie sat as prim and silent on her seat as if she were a little image, and never opened her lips to say anything at all except ' Yes ' or ' No, ' in the demurest way you ever heard.

Indeed she was so silent that, to tell the truth, she made it a very dull evening to all the rest. Poor Meg

could not get back her spirits at all, but sat by her mother's side hemming her little pocket handkerchiefs quite dejectedly, and as for the boys, after hanging round the table for nearly an hour in the vain hope that somebody would get Effie to talk, Harry, quite hurt and disgusted, beckoned David away, and they betook themselves at the farther end of the room to some game of their own, which, however (so much had they been impressed by Effie's singular behaviour), they played in a subdued way that was most unusual.

It was undoubtedly a dull evening. But the strangest part of it all was this—that as soon as ever Meg and her cousin had wished the others good-night, and had gone upstairs to their own room, then Effie began to talk again.

Now there was nothing in the world that Meg would have liked better than to have a good talk with her cousin, if her cousin had been like any other little girl ; but then you know (if Meg might judge from a single example), Effie did talk so very queerly. Effie altogether was so very queer ! However, the first words that she said now were not so alarming as might have been feared,

‘Don’t you ever have any fun here in the evening?’ she said; and on the whole this question rather cheered and comforted Meg, for she had begun to fear that Effie did not know what such a thing as fun meant, which would have been a terrible disaster, for Meg herself loved to be merry with all her heart. So she brightened up a little and answered cheerily—

‘O yes, lots of fun! As much as ever we like.’

‘Then why did we have none to-night?’ retorted Effie instantly.

Now as it was undoubtedly Effie’s own fault that they had all been so dull, this was rather a delicate question to answer. Poor Meg did not know how to do it at all so as to reconcile truth with politeness, so she did what we all of us ought to be ashamed of ourselves for ever doing—she threw the blame upon those who were out of the room.

‘I think the boys were a little shy,’ she said, and imagined that she had got out of the difficulty neatly.

But it turned out that this was not in the least the sort of answer that Effie wanted.

‘O, *that’s* not what I mean!’ she exclaimed im-

mediately. 'It wasn't the boys. It was your mother. What made her stay in the room all night?'

'Why shouldn't she stay in the room?' asked Meg, with the most innocent face of amazement in the world.

'What, and spoil everything?' cried Effie. 'The idea that we could have any fun with her there!'

'O but we do indeed!' good little Meg began eagerly to explain. 'We do always. She quite likes it. Oh, we never think of wishing mamma away,' cried Meg warmly.

'Then you are a pack of little geese,' replied Effie, with a look of unspeakable contempt, and did not condescend to utter another word for very nearly five minutes.

At the end of that time, however, she suddenly asked another question.

'Is somebody coming to take away our candle?' she demanded.

'Yes, mamma will come, or nurse,' answered Meg timidly.

'Then just you wait till they have gone, and then I'll tell you something,' said Effie, in a sharp business-like way. 'Come, be quick now. I don't want any of them

to stand talking here, and you are so slow ; you will be half an hour before you get into bed.'

Upon this Meg began to hurry with all her might ; and when the mother came presently into the room she found a little curly head nestled cosily into each pillow, and Effie's eyes already demurely closing.

'Poor little thing, she will be asleep in two minutes,' Mrs. Leighton thought to herself as she went away with the candle. But she little knew the real state of the case—for no sooner had the door closed behind her, than in an instant up Effie leapt.

'I'm coming into your bed. Do you hear? Make room !' she called out in a sudden loud whisper ; and then, before Meg could well collect her senses, the small white figure had flashed across the room, and making a single leap into the middle of the other bed, had caught Meg in an embrace that for tightness was like a bear's hug.

'She thinks I'm going to sleep ! I shut my eyes, and she went out on tiptoe. Oh, what fun !' cried Effie. 'You stupid little thing, why don't you laugh?' she exclaimed. And she shook Meg, and then hugged her

again, and then pushed her up against the wall, all in the space of three or four seconds. It was amazing, considering how small she was, to see what an amount of strength she had in her little thin arms.

‘Oh, don’t, please—you are hurting me! Oh!’ cried poor little Meg piteously, as she was being knocked about; but Effie attended to her no more than if she had been a little kitten mewing.

‘I never was in such a morsel of a bed before. It’s no bigger than the berths in the ship. It’s a horrid little bed. I’m going to kick you out of it,’ cried Effie; and she proceeded to put this threat into execution with such rapidity that, before Meg could take breath, she had tumbled her out upon the floor, and had sprung on her own feet, and begun to execute an unknown dance in the middle of the mattress.

Poor Meg gathered herself together, and sat down in a little heap on the floor. Meg was a merry little soul, and liked a romp as well as anybody, but there was something in Effie’s kind of merriment that almost frightened her. She was rather nearer crying than laughing now as she sat shivering on the carpet in her night-dress.

‘Oh, Effie ! please don’t. They will hear you downstairs, and mamma won’t like it. Oh, I wish you wouldn’t !’ cried little Meg in meek distress.

But never a bit did Effie heed any word she said, till, after this state of things had continued for two or three minutes, all at once, like a flash of lightning, she leapt from the bed, sprang across Meg as she sat upon the ground, and regained her own crib ; and then, as the door softly opened, and the light of a candle stole across the room, she was lying still as a mouse between the blankets, to all appearance fast asleep.

Nothing unusual was to be seen as Mrs. Leighton came in but poor little Meg, sitting disconsolately on the floor.

‘My dear, what in the world have you been doing ?’ her mother asked in an astonished whisper at the sight of her. ‘How could you make all this noise when your cousin is going to sleep ? And why are you out of bed ?’

But little Meg looked utterly bewildered, and could not say a word for herself, so that the good mother could but imagine she had had some dreadful dream (though, indeed, there hardly seemed to have been time for that),

and had been rolling about in her bed till she had fallen out of it; and as she could not get any explanation from her she helped her softly back again (being very careful not to make a noise for fear of awakening Effie), and then, telling her to be sure to lie still, and not disturb her cousin any more, she took up her candle again, and went away, leaving little Meg with both heart and head in a state of complete confusion.

There was dead silence in the room for a little while after the mother had closed the door, and Meg was just faintly beginning to hope that perhaps her cousin really was falling asleep this time, when suddenly through the darkness she saw something white coming near her with no more sound than if it had been a cat walking on egg-shells, and in another moment Effie had leapt like a feather into the middle of the bed again, and had clapped her hand over Meg's mouth (which, indeed, it was well that she did, for poor little Meg had been upon the point of screaming), and was gabbling away as fast as her tongue would let her.

'Now, hold your tongue, you little goose!' she whispered. 'If you make a sound you will bring her

galloping up again. To think of her sitting down there, and hearing everything we do ! I never knew such a bother. But we'll have some fun in spite of her ; just you see if we don't !' And with that she hugged Meg in her arms again till she nearly hugged the breath out of her, and till Meg, who had never seen anything like her in her life, could almost have cried for fright.

She was beginning to think—not knowing in that case what in the world she should do—that perhaps Effie would go on griping her like this all night, when suddenly, exhausted probably by her exertions, Effie in an instant became quite still. She let Meg go, and stretched herself out on her back to her full length, and all at once proceeded to business.

'I said I would tell you something, didn't I?' she demanded. 'Put your head close to mine, then, or they'll hear us downstairs. Oh, you stupid little thing ! I shall have such a lot to teach you before I make you as sharp as me. I'm as sharp as a needle ! and I don't like stupid people ; so you'll have to look about you. Now, then, I'll tell you some of the kind of fun I like.'

And Effie accordingly proceeded to a revelation of

some of the tricks that she was accustomed to perform, till Meg's two ears were fairly tingling with mingled horror and admiration.

She did not know what hour it was when Effie at last ceased her talking, and, suddenly announcing that she was sleepy now, and was going to her own bed, slipped out on the floor and glided back there as noiselessly as a ghost ; but she did know that it was very long indeed after that before she herself could do anything but lie wide awake, thinking of all the clever naughty things that Effie had told her she had said and done. It must have been such a very merry life that Effie had led, she thought, with all those black servants to do whatever she wanted, and to let her do all that she liked ; very merry and very delightful it must have been ; and yet somehow Meg was a little disturbed about it, and once in the dark she stretched out her arms, and wished—she hardly knew why—that she could put them round her mother's neck. For, you see, this good little Meg was very fond of her mother, and Effie had been talking in such a strange way to-night about both mothers and fathers that Meg was more than half afraid that she had been very

wicked to listen to her ; and she lay thinking this, and thinking too how strange Effie was, and wondering how they would get on with her, and doubting if they would ever like her very much, till, when she fell asleep at last, it was with quite a weight upon her mind.

CHAPTER III.

YOU will have guessed by this time that Effie was by no means a particularly good little girl ; indeed, I am obliged to confess that she was not good at all, but quite the reverse of that. She was such a little mischievous and naughty monkey that, before a week was ended, she had fairly upset the whole house, and nobody knew what to do with her.

It had been a quiet, well-behaved household till she came to it. Harry, no doubt, was a little noisy and troublesome sometimes, as boys will be, and Meg and David were not always as good as gold, though they very often were ; but, on the whole, they had been reasonable, good-tempered, pleasant-natured children, and the mother, even at their worst times, had never found them very hard to manage ; but from the very

day after Effie's arrival there had been such a revolution in the house that none of the grown-up people knew what to make of it. It was some little before they could well imagine that it was Effie who was doing all the mischief, for whenever Mr. and Mrs. Leighton were in the room you never saw anything so perfectly well-behaved as Effie was ; she would sit on a little seat, reading her story-book, or doing her bit of needlework, as solemn and demure as if she had not even an idea of what fear or laughter meant. Indeed, the good mother at first used to be quite sorry to see her always so grave and shy, and would try to encourage her to play with the others, and would take a great deal of notice of her, and endeavour in all sorts of kind ways to set her at her ease, feeling sometimes quite puzzled and annoyed at the way in which her own children behaved to their little cousin ; for they, instead of seeming to take the least trouble to make her join in any of their games, would often stand at a distance from her, shaking and splitting with laughter whenever they looked at her, in the rudest and unkindest manner you ever saw.

And then, though they had formerly been such good children it was perfectly bewildering to find the number of scrapes that they got into during the week that followed Effie's coming. One day they threw down a whole tea-service of pretty old china, and broke the greater part of it, and all the mother could do she could not find out how the accident had happened, or who had been in fault about it. On another day Meg was found skulking into the house with her petticoats wringing wet up to her waist, and it was discovered that she had got over a railing that enclosed a shallow pond in the garden, and had walked right through it. When she was asked why she had done this, she only looked in a strange way askance at Effie (who was looking at *her*, apparently quite shocked), and could not say a word. Then, on a third day, there was suddenly heard a terrible screaming over all the house, and when the mother and one of the servants ran to see what could be the matter, they found Harry and Meg shrieking in the middle of the drawing-room floor, and all the white muslin window curtains in a blaze ; and nothing like an intelligible explanation could either of them give

of how this dreadful thing had happened; only it was clear that Effie, at any rate, could have had nothing to do with it, for she came running into the room just after Mrs. Leighton, and was quite as terrified and amazed at what she saw as anybody else. There was, to be sure, a very odd look on the faces of the other children when she began screaming out: 'Oh, what is it? Oh, is the house on fire?' But then everybody was so busy trying to extinguish the flames that the children might have looked in any way they liked, and nobody would have noticed it.

Thus things went on, growing worse and worse from day to day, and the only one of the four children who never got into any mischief at all, but seemed always to be perfectly quiet and good, was Effie. And yet, as I dare say you have guessed, it was in reality Effie who was at the bottom of it all.

She was, in fact, such a little piece of mischief that there was scarcely anything she was not capable of doing; she was so clever and so naughty. She was cleverer than all the other three children put together, and as she did not mind what she did—whether it was

right or wrong, or what she said, whether it was true or false—you can imagine what a life she led, and what an example she was to Harry and Meg and David.

They were a good deal shocked at her at first. Being good, quiet, homely children, of course that was natural ; when she sneered at and made fun of their father and mother they began by being very angry and miserable, and Harry would shout to her threateningly to hold her tongue, and Meg and David would look and feel almost ready to cry ; but after a little while they were not able to keep themselves from laughing, because some of the things she said were so very funny ; and so then they would call out, ‘ Oh, don’t ! ’ and, ‘ Oh, Effie, you shouldn’t ! it’s so wrong ; ’ but still they would stand giggling and listening till, by degrees—with Harry and Meg at any rate—their first feeling gradually wore away.

The first time they heard her tell a downright lie, too, all the three children looked at her with the blood flushing up in their faces to the roots of their hair ; but, by the time they had heard her tell half-a-dozen lies, I am afraid almost the strongest feeling that they had was one of mingled amazement and admiration. For they

had never so much as conceived that anybody could tell lies as Effie did, with such an innocent, wondering, anxious face, as if she was so sorry and so surprised that anybody could be wicked enough to do such things, and would like so much to help in finding out the naughty person if she could. It quite made the children feel as if story-telling could not be the miserable and shameful thing that they had always been taught until now to think it, for it was wonderful to look at Effie, and to know she was so clever that even their father and mother could not find her out. In his inmost heart Harry almost began to wish that *he* could tell lies with anything like the same success as Effie ; but I am glad to say that, on attempting under sudden temptation to do so one day, his success was *not* the same, but so very different that he repented on the spot, and acknowledged with a momentary sigh, but also with a certain feeling of relief, that it was clear his genius did not lie that way : which was an excellent conclusion for Harry to come to.

It was not only, however, by means of her naughty talking that Effie gained the influence she did over the

other children. She was so clever in every way. She taught them all kinds of games they had never heard of before ; she told them wonderful tales—sometimes true ones, sometimes stories that she made out of her head ; she urged them on to the doing of every sort of thing. There was nothing that she was frightened to attempt ; they never had come across a creature who was so daring and so quick. To be sure, when, in consequence of any of their wild games, they got into trouble, she always managed in a most wonderful way to get out of the scrape herself, and to pretend that she had had nothing to do with the whole business ; but then, if they ever ventured to complain of this, she would ask them with a burst of laughter why they didn't try to do the same ? *she* didn't prevent them, she said ; all she wanted was to take care of herself ; and as she always managed to do this before anybody else could do it, just out of pure quickness and cleverness, Harry and Meg and David, left like three scape-goats behind, soon found that there was nothing for it but to make up their minds to bear what was unavoidable—that is to say, to bear their own punishment and Effie's too. People *must* make

up their minds, you know, to pay something for having such very clever cousins.

And yet, perhaps, poor little Effie, in spite of all her cleverness, and of all the triumphant way in which she was going on, was, if the truth were to be known, a good deal to be pitied. For she had never had anybody all her life to teach her what was right. Her mother was a very delicate, sickly lady, who could not bear the noise of children, and whenever Effie had been allowed to be in the same room with her she had been forced to sit as still as a mouse ; and her father was so busy that of him she had never seen almost anything ; and it was only when she was with her Ayah (that is, her Indian nurse), or with some of the other black servants, that she had ever been allowed to have any fun like other children. And so she had grown up almost without any love at all either for her father or her mother, but caring only for servants, who spoilt and made a plaything of her, and taught her all kinds of tricks and naughty ways—foolish and ignorant, and some of them wicked servants, for they made her tell stories, and laughed to see how cleverly she did it ;

they applauded all her mischievous pranks ; they encouraged her to say and think all kinds of wrong things about her father and mother, till she quite believed that she might cheat and disobey them in every way she could.

It was a sad state of things ; but yet you will feel that poor little Effie was more sinned against than sinning. How could she help growing up naughty when she had such naughty people round her ? more especially, too, when she was so quick that she learnt everything that they taught her in half the time that it would have taken most children to do it. All these black servants delighted in her cleverness, and, of course, the cleverer they found her, the more they liked to teach her and to have her with them. As for making her so deceitful and so terrible a little liar as they did, they themselves hardly believed that there was any harm in that. They thought it such a fine thing to be able to lie and deceive without anyone finding it out, that they had the most prodigious admiration for poor little Effie, and were even so fond of her that more than one of them, I believe, would have

given his life to save her from coming to any harm. And she on her part too was fond of them. She used often to treat them indeed as no little English boy or girl would be allowed to treat a cat or dog in the streets, but yet when she came away from India, though she said good-bye to her father and mother so coldly that you would have thought she did not care whether or not she might ever see them again, she kissed and cried over the black servants, and when it came to the parting with her Ayah, she clung to her and sobbed as if her heart would break. Often when little Indian girls are sent home their Ayahs come to England with them, but in Effie's case it was not so, for the lady in whose charge she was placed had her own servant with her. And so at one moment poor Effie parted from every living creature she had ever seen before ; and perhaps nobody altogether knew how great a pang it gave her.

She had, however, it must be confessed, quite recovered her spirits before she reached England, and indeed, to tell the truth, the lady who brought her home had a terrible time of it with her for the greater

part of the voyage. It had been bad enough when Effie played tricks amongst the people she was fond of, but that was nothing compared with the way in which she went on when she had not a creature near her for whom she cared the least bit in the world. She conducted herself just like a perfect little spirit of mischief, and never did anyone feel more relieved than the lady did when she delivered her up safely at last into her uncle's hands at Southampton.

And now Effie had once more started afresh in her uncle's house, and I must go on telling you what kind of a business she made of it.

CHAPTER IV.

FOR six or eight days both Mr. and Mrs. Leighton were completely taken in by her. 'She is an amazingly quiet little creature,' Mr. Leighton would say ; and Mrs. Leighton would answer kindly, 'Yes, I am afraid she feels everything very strange to her. I wish we could make her a little more at home.' And then, without a notion of what was passing behind their backs, they would try to cheer her, and to encourage her to play with her little cousins. But in the middle of the second week something happened that caused a curious discovery to be made.

Mrs. Leighton had to go one day to make some purchases in the town, which was four or five miles off, and for that purpose she left home early in the

afternoon, warning the children that they must be very good and not get into any mischief, because the servants were busy and could not look much after them, and she should not be back for several hours. It happened, however, that when she had driven a couple of miles she found she had forgotten a parcel that it was quite necessary she should have, so she was obliged unwillingly to turn home again. As soon as she reached the house, without calling anyone—for the door was standing open, as it generally did in summer—she ran up stairs to her own room where the parcel had been left; and when she opened the door what do you think she saw? Her wardrobe was standing open, clothes of all sorts lay tumbled out upon the floor, and in the midst of them there was the oddest little bedizened figure—a small creature, tricked out in all the finery it had been able to lay its hands on; feathers and flowers upon its head, jewels round its neck and on its fingers, silk and lace sweeping the ground all round it in a train a yard long. For a moment the mother really did not know who it was, and

stared full at it quite bewildered; and it was only when she plainly saw the reflection of Effie's face in the swing glass before which she was dancing, and curtseying, and grinning to herself like a monkey, that she could really believe that this little fantastic mountebank was the quiet child she had had in her house for the last ten days.

Effie it was, however; there was no doubt of that; and after one moment's pause of astonishment, Mrs. Leighton went straight up to her. 'Effie!' she said; and poor Effie, who at the same instant had caught sight of her approaching figure in the glass, turned sharply round with a look in her eyes just like that of some little wild animal who had suddenly found itself in a trap. You see, this was a case in which it was plain that even lying could not help her. She was caught, and there was no escape, by either straight or crooked means.

The mother went up close to her, and laid her hand upon her shoulder.

'My dear, what put it into your head to do all this?' she said.

She did not speak angrily at all, but Effie pushed her hand away, and made no answer. Poor Effie had been accustomed in India, on the rare occasions when her naughtinesses were found out, to be punished for them harshly, and she took it for granted that she was going to be punished now, and prepared herself to submit, as she always had submitted at home, in sullen silence. So she pushed her aunt's hand away roughly from her shoulder. What was the good of people pretending to be kind to her, she thought, when they were going to whip her, perhaps, or send her to bed, or shut her up in a room alone?

Mrs. Leighton had no thought of whipping Effie, or of doing any other of these things; but of course poor Effie did not know that.

'You thought you would amuse yourself by dressing up—was that it?' Mrs. Leighton said. 'But, my child, you must have known that it was not right to take things out of my drawers, and throw them about in this way. Did you not know that, Effie? If you had asked me in the morning I would have given you some clothes to play with; but look here—do you not see the mis-

chief you have done? Look at the hole you have torn in this lace ; and this dress you have got on— O Effie, you have soiled it all down the front with your dirty fingers. My child, how could you be so foolish and naughty ?’ And then the mother looked at her again, and did not know what to say or do next, for Effie never answered a word, nor showed by the least look in her face that she was sorry or ashamed. You never, indeed, saw such a stolid little immoveable face as she put on.

Mrs. Leighton was puzzled ; she thought there was something in the matter she did not understand.

‘ Does Meg know what you have been doing ? Where is Meg ?’ she asked.

But not a syllable would Effie speak.

‘ Do you not know ?’

You would have supposed, to look at Effie, that she was deaf and dumb.

‘ Effie,’ said Mrs. Leighton in a grieved way, ‘ you are vexing me.’

But Effie did not mind that in the very least, and there was a pause before the mother spoke again.

‘Take off these things,’ she said at last.

On this Effie slowly began to take them off, and shed one piece of finery after another on the floor.

‘Put on your own frock again.’

Effie did this too.

‘And now, my child, come here to me.’ And then Mrs. Leighton drew the little girl to her side, and sat down and talked to her. She talked to her a little about the naughtiness of having meddled with all these things that did not belong to her, but she did not say much about this ; what grieved her far more than Effie’s folly in dressing herself in these borrowed plumes was her hard and sullen manner, and the dogged way in which she refused to open her lips, or say one word, either good or bad. This hurt her deeply, for she had tried so much to be kind to Effie. Besides, whatever faults her own children had, obstinacy and want of feeling were not amongst them ; they, poor little souls, were in the habit of melting into tears when they had done wrong at the first reproving word, and Mrs. Leighton hardly knew what to do with anyone who was so different from this as Effie was. She talked to her, but

she felt all the time that she might just as well be talking to the winds ; and so after some minutes she at last rose up with a little sigh, and said quietly—

‘ You may go away now, Effie. I don’t know whether you have been listening to me at all, but I will try to think you have. Go to your own room for a little while, and then, if you like, you may go and find your cousins. As for all these things, you cannot put them back, so leave them to me.’

And then Effie went her way, grinning to her little naughty self at the lucky escape she had had as soon as she got outside the door ; and Mrs. Leighton picked up a few of her clothes, and laid them straight, and locked the door upon all the rest of the confusion, and set off again to do her work in town, feeling sorely puzzled, and indeed quite bewildered in her mind.

For, you see, till now Effie had appeared to her to be the most well-behaved, demure, and quiet little child she had ever come across, and to see such a sudden transformation come over her was a sort of thing to take one’s breath away. Indeed, she was so astonished at it that, though she had seen the little tricked-out figure

playing its antics so glibly before her glass with her own eyes, she could even yet hardly believe that this was anything more than a sudden and unnatural fit of mischievousness that had seized her, and that in spite of it she really *was*, what she had hitherto seemed to be, a good grave little girl, whose main fault was that she was so shy and timid that it was rather difficult to get on with her.

And meanwhile Effie, I am sorry to say, was in a very naughty temper. She was heartily glad indeed at having got out of her scrape so easily, but at the same time she was as angry as she could be with her aunt because she had brought her into a scrape at all, and I should not like to tell you all the bad things she thought and said to herself about that kind aunt in the course of the afternoon. When Meg, who had been learning her lessons quietly in the schoolroom, came presently upstairs to look for her cousin, she found her sitting on the floor of her bedroom, with a pencil and a sheet of paper, on which the naughty little monkey was drawing caricatures of her aunt, and grinning and showing her teeth at them as she made them.

O Effie !' Meg exclaimed, and coloured up to the roots of her hair as she saw her at this employment ; and then Effie opened her mouth, and made such a story out of what had happened that Meg listened to it quite overwhelmed.

I don't think for my own part that Effie's statement was a very trustworthy one, but poor little Meg listened to it with tears of grief and sympathy in her eyes, and did not know how to separate the truth from the falsehood. It seemed to her, from the way in which Effie put it, that her mother must have been very hard, and that Effie, who had only been playing a little, had been quite the injured person. You may imagine from this in what a dexterous way Effie told her simple little tale.

Well, that night, when the mother came home, Effie was as quiet as a mouse. Mrs. Leighton found her sitting in a corner of the drawing-room when she returned, reading a book, and she never so much as stirred or lifted up her eyes when her aunt came into the room. Five minutes before she had been romping with the other children, and making noise enough to be heard all over the house ; but the instant Harry, looking from the

window, had called out 'There's mamma !' and run off to meet her, Effie had slipped into her corner, and there Mrs. Leighton found her, looking perfectly stolid and indifferent.

'Well, Effie !' her aunt said, as she came into the room, but Effie only moved one of her shoulders, and made no other answer ; and though the other three children began to chatter away, and pour out the history of all they had been doing during the afternoon, not one word all the time they were talking came from Effie. At least not one word did she speak with her lips, but I am sorry to say she spoke a good many in her heart, and some of them were very bad words. For she was very like a young savage—this poor little child ; and because she had been detected she hated the person who had detected her, and would have liked to do an injury to her. She did not remember, or choose to remember, how kind her aunt had been to her. She had been accustomed all her life to look upon the people who were set in authority over her as her natural enemies, whom it was her business to deceive and get the better of if she could, and with whom she had the right to be

angry if, instead of that, they got the better of *her*. As for learning to love her aunt, the bare idea of such a thing had never occurred to her. She would have thought it as absurd as if you had expected a prisoner to love his jailor, and be grateful to him for keeping him under lock and key. She looked upon fathers and mothers and uncles and aunts exactly as she might have done upon so many jailors.

‘I am puzzled about Effie,’ Mrs. Leighton said that night to her husband ; and she told him what had happened during the afternoon. ‘I begin to fear that we have made a mistake about her, and that she may give us a good deal of trouble,’ she said.

And then they talked the matter over, and they agreed that Effie must be watched a little more closely. ‘Though I can’t imagine that there is much mischief in her ; she seems such a quiet, spiritless little thing,’ Mr. Leighton said. ‘It appears to me that her main fault lies in her being rather wanting in character altogether.’

By which speech you may guess how much her uncle knew about Effie.

However, Mrs. Leighton, who, you see, had had her

eyes opened a little, began to keep watch ; and as the result of her watching during the next week, here are one or two of the things she learnt :—

One day the children went out into the grounds to play. There were very pretty grounds about the house, in which they spent a great deal of their time. Some parts of them were laid out as flower and vegetable gardens, and one part, which was quite wild and uncultivated, they called the wilderness, and they were fonder of playing here than anywhere else, because they were allowed to do in it almost what they liked.

They used to play all kinds of games here, and in particular one game, which was very exciting, though it was also rather rough, in which the wilderness was supposed to be divided into a number of separate states over which the children ruled, and which were continually making war upon one another. There was, of course, a good deal of make-believe about this game, seeing that the armies which were being perpetually led out to battle were purely imaginary, the whole population of each state being represented simply by Harry, or Meg, or David, as the case might be ; but, as Harry had

at the first impressed upon each of the other children the imperative necessity of considering him or herself as a noun of multitude, this difficulty had from the outset been easily and satisfactorily got over ; and, as you may well believe, the simplicity of the arrangement secured, throughout the various armies, a fine general unity and singleness of action.

The great continent in which these several states were comprehended could scarcely, I think, to an unprejudiced or peaceful person, have been a pleasant place to live in, for the state of disturbance in which it was perpetually plunged exceeded all description. Revolutions in every part of it were of hourly occurrence ; not a day passed in which battles were not fought, and kings wounded and taken prisoners ; crowns changed hands with the rapidity of lightning, and were restored to the heads of their original possessors again as if by magic ; and there was no sort of business, except fighting, done throughout the length and breadth of the land. The four children, however, found endless delight in it, and few hours passed more rapidly with them than those that they

spent in the exciting sport of conquering one another's kingdoms, or losing their own.

It was a game in which cleverness and dexterity told, and so, I need hardly say, it was a game that suited Effie. Effie had not been with her cousins for a couple of days before they found that they had never yet had to do with an enemy so wily and quick, so cautious, and yet so scheming. Why, there was no trick too cunning for Effie to think of, nothing too adventurous for her to do. If it had not been that, by prudently humbling herself before her, Meg secured her for an ally, it would all have been over with Meg for ever in a very short time ; and as for little David, though Harry took him under his protection, David was taken prisoner in the course of the first week five-and-twenty different times ; and at last, one day (which is the day that I want to bring you to) was so completely and ignominiously vanquished, that Effie declared him to be too miserable a creature to live, and she accordingly sentenced him to be buried alive, and proceeded to carry out that terrible sentence on the spot. It was a serious outlook for poor David.

‘You go to the garden, and get a spade,’ said Effie to Meg with firmness ; and Meg departed, trying to think that it was good fun, but not quite easy in her mind.

‘And now sit still there, and don’t you stir till I’ve dug your grave,’ said Effie threateningly to little David ; and proceeded to look about for a convenient place on which to set to work.

‘But I can’t think why you should bury me. It would be so much nicer to be beheaded,’ said Davie plaintively.

‘Yes, I think you had better not bury him,’ suggested Harry, after a moment or two. ‘It will make such a mess.’

But Effie had begun to sing, and went on singing quite undisturbed by these remarks. She had a way of chanting things instead of saying them, which was rather terrible at times to Davie, for he had noticed before now that when she began to chant her words she was always very determined about meaning them. To *say* a dreadful thing was never half so alarming to him as when he heard her begin to sing it, for he always knew that she was in earnest then ; and so his heart at present began to beat a little fast when he found her going about

looking for a nice moist bit of earth, and softly chanting to herself, 'I'll dig a hole, a hole, a hole, down amongst the worms,' in such a dismal minor key that, even had the hole not been meant for him, it would quite have depressed him to hear it.

'O Effie, don't, please ! It will be so nasty. I don't like it !' he cried out piteously at last, after he had stood it for a little while.

But Effie did not condescend to take the least notice of him. She only went humming on till Meg came back with the spade, and then she fell to work ; and after two or three minutes, I am sorry to say, the sight of what she was about became so interesting, that Harry, instead of standing by his brother any longer, as he ought to have done, being David's ally, went over, perfidiously and unconditionally, to the enemy.

'Let *me* dig a bit; I can do it better than you,' said Harry, and stretched out his hand for the spade.

'O Harry ! that's a shame,' cried Meg. 'I don't think *you* ought to help.'

But Harry, having stifled his conscience, had little intention of listening to Meg.

‘I’ll do it twice as fast as you can,’ he only said ; and then Effie, being a little tired, gave her weapon up.

So between them, with a good deal of labour, for the ground was hard, they dug the grave. They made a nice, good-sized hole, adapting it as they best could to the shape of Davie in a sitting posture, for it was in that position, with his knees up, that Effie resolved he should be buried. It was a good, comfortable, squarish hole.

‘I’m sure I shouldn’t mind being buried in it myself,’ Harry said when it was finished, meaning perhaps to give a crumb of comfort to Davie that way.

‘I wish you *would* be buried in it then,’ Davie retorted a little indignantly ; for Davie felt that he had been deceived and basely treated by his brother’s desertion of him. But of course Harry took no notice of this ill-tempered reply.

‘You may take off the prisoner’s chains now,’ said Effie ; and Meg at once proceeded to remove them. (They were, of course, wholly imaginary chains.)

‘Now sir, walk in !’ said Effie in a tone of command. But here there occurred a sudden hitch.

‘I *won’t* walk in,’ replied Davie, roused to defiance.

‘Put him to the torture then,’ said Effie instantly.

Being put to the torture meant, amongst these monarchs, being unmercifully tickled. It had been poor David’s ill fortune more than once before now to be tortured within an inch of his life, and the poor little fellow entertained a wholesome dread of the operation.

‘Oh, don’t ! I’ll go in !’ he cried shrilly ; and—advancing to the hole, half with fear, half with a sort of laugh, for the thing was funny too, and there is always a certain charm in something new—helped by the others, he got in. ‘Is he to be buried in his clothes?’ Harry had asked a little while before ; but David had called out ‘Oh, yes ! please !’ so eagerly, that the question had not been discussed ; and so in he got, clothes and all.

And then they shovelled the earth down over him. Of course, you know, they were not so ignorant or so wicked as to think of putting his head underground. That would have been a thing beyond what even Effie would have dared, but they left nothing above ground *but* his head, and when all the earth was shovelled in they trod it nice and tight about his neck till they had made quite a neat job of it ; and then they stood

still and looked at their work, and Effie laughed and clapped her hands, and danced with delight.

‘I buried a little black boy so once, and I kept him in his grave all night. Oh, it was such fun!’ Effie cried.

‘It wouldn’t do to keep Davie in all night,’ Harry said a little seriously.

‘Oh no!—and I wish you wouldn’t keep me in any longer at all. It feels so strange, I don’t like it,’ David cried plaintively.

‘Who do you think cares whether you like it or not?’ said Effie with scorn. ‘You’re a prisoner. You’ll have to pay a ransom of fifteen hundred thousand pounds before you get out.’

‘Well, I *will* pay it,’ said Davie with humiliating submission. ‘I can’t say more than that. I shall have to put a tax on everything, and then I’ll pay you.’ Oh Harry, please let me out!’

‘Children, where are you? Are you in the wilderness?’ the mother’s voice called suddenly at this moment from the garden, and all at once there was dead silence, and a look rather of consternation on the children’s faces.

‘Run away, and I’ll pull him out. Run away and stop her!’ Effie whispered hurriedly next instant; and away went Harry and Meg, fast but rather guiltily, and Effie, seizing the spade, began to dig with all her might.

‘Where are the rest of you? Have Effie and David not been with you?’ the mother asked as the two came towards her.

‘Yes, they are both up there; they—they are coming,’ said Meg a little uneasily.

‘We will go and meet them then, and go that way to the road. I think I may have a little walk with you for half an hour before tea,’ Mrs. Leighton said, and went forward; the two children, not knowing how to prevent her, following slowly after.

It was only a little way. She might have taken a wrong turn, for the path through the wilderness twisted about in rather a labyrinthine manner; but, unluckily for the children, she took the right one, and arrived on the scene of action just as Effie, with all her might, was tugging at Davie’s arm, and that poor little victim was emerging from the earth, muddy and clayey from top to toe.

‘My boy, what in the world have you been doing? What hole is that? Did you tumble into it?’ the mother exclaimed amazed.

She did really think at first that the child had tumbled in. She went up to him, and took hold of him, and surveyed him all over before it struck her that no mere tumble could have brought him into such a dirty state. But when she looked close at him she saw that he must have done something more than merely fall into the hole, and so then she turned round to the other three, and—

‘Children, what have you been about?’ she said quickly. ‘Meg, you ought to have looked after Davie. Tell me at once what you have been doing.’

‘We were only—only burying him,’ said Meg reluctantly at this address.

‘Burying him?’ said the mother.

‘Not his head,’ said Meg. ‘Only the rest of him—because he was a prisoner.’

‘And so because he was a prisoner you thought you had a right to let him get into this state? Meg,’ said the mother, ‘I am surprised at you! Who was it who thought of this plan of burying him?’

To this question there came no answer ; only the children glanced for a moment at Effie, and then looked on the ground.

‘ Was it you, Effie ?’ said the mother suddenly.

‘ No !’ said Effie boldly, and looked straight at her with a pair of hard eyes.

The other children gave a little gasp ; but they had heard Effie tell quite as daring lies before, so, though they drew in their breath for a moment, nobody said a word.

‘ Meg, was it you ?’ the mother said.

‘ No—at least I don’t think so. No, it was not, mother,’ poor Meg said confusedly.

‘ I helped to dig the hole, but—but I wasn’t the first,’ said Harry, blurting out his words suddenly, with the colour coming to his face.

‘ Then there is only David left. Am I to suppose that David wanted to bury himself ?’ the mother said sadly.

And then, when nobody spoke—

‘ Children, go home,’ she said, ‘ and David, you come with me. You are all in fault more or less, and one of you is *greatly* in fault ; you have done something far

worse than merely setting the rest to play a foolish game—you have told a lie to me about it.’

Mrs. Leighton said this very gravely, and then she took David by the hand and turned away.

‘I am only too right about Effie,’ she thought to herself, as she went back to the house. ‘The others told the truth ; it was Effie who said what was not true.’

And so presently, when an hour or two had passed, she took Effie aside and talked to her, and tried to bring her to confess what she had done. But Effie would confess nothing.

This was one of the naughtinesses in which this poor little thing was found out. (I call her ‘poor’ because I think anybody who, like her, has lived for nine years in the world, and never learnt to know right from wrong, deserves to be pitied very much indeed.) This was one of her naughtinesses ; and here is the history of another that happened two days afterwards.

It was Sunday morning, and the children were just dressing for church when their nurse met with a little accident : she fell down, and hurt herself so much that Mrs. Leighton did not like to go out and leave her. Mr. Leighton

was away from home, and there was no one to go to church with the children, so they were sent off by themselves. They had gone to church by themselves once or twice already on former occasions, so their mother let them take their departure without any misgivings ; but she forgot for the moment that they had never gone alone since Effie came.

It was a half-mile's walk, through pretty country lanes. They set off in very good time, and if all had gone on as it should have done they would have been in their places in church a few minutes before the service began ; but I am sorry to say that all did *not* go on as it should have done by any means, for they had no sooner got out of sight of the house than Effie began her tricks.

‘ Now put off your Sunday faces,’ she exclaimed, ‘ and see if we don't have some fun.’

And the next instant, in spite of her nice white frock, she was clambering up the hedges, picking blackberries, and staining her clothes and fingers with their juice, and laughing and singing till the three other children, who had never thought that *anybody* did such things on Sunday, were all quite shocked.

That is to say, they were very much shocked *at first*.

‘I say, Effie, don’t!’ Harry cried very gravely; and Meg piped out shrilly, ‘Oh, Effie, somebody will hear you!’ and little David stood still, and opened his grey eyes very wide. But after a few moments, as they stood watching Effie, they began to think that it was rather fine fun too, and first one and then another of them came near, and began to pull blackberries also, and to laugh and talk, louder and louder, till at last, in the midst of their gabbling, they were suddenly brought back to their senses by hearing the church bells stop.

‘Oh dear, we shall be so late!’ Meg exclaimed then, rather conscience-struck, and let the blackberry branch drop that she was holding.

‘Well, and what if we are?’ answered Effie recklessly. ‘We shall have enough of it I’m sure. Just look what a mess I’m in!’ And so she was, there was no doubt of that. ‘I shall have to say that I fell into the hedge, or something of that sort. But I don’t care! Come along then, if you *must* come.’

And away went Effie, pirouetting along the road, while the other children followed at her back, half

laughing at her, half feeling in their hearts that, though delightful, it must be very wicked ; and in this way they arrived at the church, and made their way into their pew just as the clergyman was beginning to read the first lesson.

It was a pew in the gallery—a front pew in a very prominent place. As the children stole into it Harry, and Meg, and Davie, it must be allowed, felt a good deal ashamed, and kept their eyes fixed upon the ground, for they were sure that half the congregation were looking at them ; but Effie, who never seemed to know what shame meant, looked up as bold as brass, and had no sooner taken her seat than she began to nudge Meg in the ribs, and whisper to her, and do all that she could to make her laugh.

‘O Effie, be quiet now—do be quiet!’ poor Meg whispered back, in great straits at such behaviour ; but this request had little effect on Effie. On she went in the same way till the lesson was ended, and then, when they rose up to sing the *Te Deum*, matters, instead of getting better, got worse.

‘I’ll drop my prayer-book,’ she said to Meg. ‘There’s a bald man down below : I’ll drop it on his head.’ And, to Meg’s terror, no sooner had she said this than down she pitched the book, making such a noise—for it fell on the edge of a pew, and not upon the head of the bald gentleman—that every eye in the church looked up to her.

After this, she ducked down to the bottom of the pew, and began to tickle Meg’s and David’s legs, till in an agony of laughter Meg and David had to duck after her ; when, shielded from view, all three of them (for children are but children, and an evil example is a contagious thing) whispered, and giggled, and played antics together, till Harry, though he tried to help it and look demure, could contain himself no longer ; and the clergyman was just finishing the second lesson when a fresh sound like a little explosion startled the congregation, and the next instant Harry, with his handkerchief stuffed into his mouth, was seen bolting from the pew and hurriedly making for the gallery door, which he had barely reached before all the other three children, like a covey of partridges, were in flight

after him. All the people looked at one another, and gravely shook their heads as the naughty little retreating feet went hurrying and scuffling down the stairs.

When they got out once more into the open air Effie was half beside herself with delight. She capered, and danced, and ran, and screamed with laughter. The other three, if they had been left to themselves, would have come to their senses in a very few minutes, and have felt ashamed of how they had conducted themselves, but Effie's example intoxicated them, and, instead of returning to their right minds, I think for the next hour they lost their heads altogether.

Of course they did not go straight home, as to have done that so early would have betrayed them : they rambled instead amongst the fields and lanes, going on with the wildest fun and nonsense ; and it was only when they were quite worn out, and so hot that their cheeks were all in a glow, that they began to wonder what o'clock it was, and to think that perhaps church must be over, and that they had better be bringing their playing to an end. So at last, with their dresses

all soiled and crumpled, and their hair wild and rough, they began to make their way home.

As they came near the house, it must be confessed that Harry and Meg and David felt anything but easy in their minds. Their excitement was passing away, and they were beginning to think, with rather a miserable feeling, that their mother would be terribly vexed if she could know how they had been going on ; they had an uncomfortable suspicion too that in some way she *would* hear about it, and that, though their fun was over, their punishment was perhaps yet to come.

In this state of mind, they tried when they got in to steal up to their own room without being seen, but just as they were crossing the hall their mother came out from the dining-room and met them.

‘Why, children, how late you are,’ she said. They had not made their calculation as to time very correctly, and they were a full half hour later than they ought to have been. ‘And what is the matter with you ’ (she began to look at them here) ‘that you are all so hot? Where have you been since church? Meg, what have you been doing?’

‘We have only been—been playing a little,’ said Meg on this, with her eyes upon the ground.

‘My dears, you know I don’t like you to stop and play on your way from church. Surely,’ said the mother, ‘you know that? You have run yourselves into a heat now; and Meg and Effie, your frocks are not fit to be seen. Go up stairs quickly and get yourselves made neat. Children, I am vexed with you. You know you ought to have come straight home.’

When she had said this, Mrs. Leighton went back into the dining-room, and the children went upstairs.

‘We’ve escaped pretty well,’ Effie whispered with a laugh. But the others did not laugh back nor answer her. Possibly if they had not escaped quite so easily they might have felt a little happier than they did.

After this the day passed on, and till about five o’clock nothing more occurred; but about five in the afternoon a lady was shown into the drawing-room where Mrs. Leighton was sitting alone, and, as soon as they had shaken hands—

‘My dear Mrs. Leighton,’ the lady said, ‘I don’t usually make Sunday calls, as you know, but I thought

it would not be right to let the day pass without coming to tell you how naughtily your young people conducted themselves in church this morning.'

And then she told the whole story.

'I cannot tell you how shocked I was,' she said. 'The prayer-book actually almost fell on the top of poor dear Mr. Dixon's head. It was the nearest miss; and only think, if it had struck him, it might really have made a cut—so little hair as he has. And the worst is that I know it was done on purpose, for I was watching the naughty little girl. Oh, she behaved very very badly. I never saw anything like it in a church before. And then all four of them running out in that way! Oh! I can't tell you how vexed I was. I felt so for you, for I know so well that your own children would have behaved as nicely as possible if they had been by themselves. I have seen them in church alone before, you know; but it is that other little girl. My dear Mrs. Leighton, she is a terrible child. I declare I would not keep her in the house if I were you!'

'Poor thing! I am beginning to fear she *is* a terrible child,' Mrs. Leighton answered sadly

The good mother was terribly vexed. She sat for a little while after her visitor left her, thinking what she should do; and then she went to the four children, who were all together in their play-room, and told them what she had heard.

As she talked to them she did not lay the blame more upon Effie than upon the rest; she told them how they had *all* grieved and pained her, and tried in her wise, gentle, tender way to make them feel how much worse a piece of naughtiness they had committed than any ordinary naughtiness when they had shown so little reverence for God's house and God's service as to disturb the people who were worshipping Him, and at such a time to talk and laugh and play tricks.

As she talked like this the tears began to gather in Meg's and David's eyes, and Harry's lip quivered, and the colour came into his face; but as usual Effie looked cool and unconcerned, and went on playing, while Mrs. Leighton spoke, with a bit of string that she had in her hand. Mrs. Leighton said nothing to her specially, it seemed to her that it would be no use; nor did she ask her any questions, for she felt that she could not

believe her answers. Such questions as she put at all she put to the others ; and they, poor little souls, being quite subdued and ashamed of themselves, answered them very truthfully. They were so subdued, indeed, that Meg and Davie, before Mrs. Leighton left the room, were clinging sobbing round her neck, and Harry had got his head upon her shoulder. You see, these three had had a happy life, and had never hitherto felt any grief so bitter to them as the grief of making their father or their mother angry. They had grown up thinking that hardly any anguish could be greater than that, and even Effie's influence had scarcely made them change their minds yet. As for Effie just now, while they hung about their mother's neck, she looked up at them and stared. To the poor little lonely child, such love as this for a person who had the power to scold and punish them was like something she had no power to understand. Poor Effie ! Vexed as she was, the mother's kind heart ached as she looked at her, standing there by herself, aimlessly tying knots in her bit of cord.

I have told you only two pieces of mischief in which Effie was found out, but she was detected in a

good many more during those days when Mrs. Leighton made it her business to watch and study her. This conduct of hers in church, however, was the last. On the evening of this Sunday Mrs. Leighton thought over the whole matter to herself, and the next day, when her husband, who had been away for some days, came home, she told him the conclusion to which she had come.

‘My dear, we must send Effie away,’ she said. ‘I feel that I am not able to manage her, and she is doing more harm than I can tell you to the other children.’


‘Then let us send her off to school,’ Mr. Leighton answered.

But the mother said, ‘No; I have been thinking of that, and I feel that I cannot send her amongst other girls if I would not let her stay with my own. It would not be right. I think we must try and find somebody to take her who has no children. I have been turning over all kinds of plans in my head, and that is the best one that I can think of.’

And then they agreed that they would begin without

delay to look out for a suitable person with whom to place her. But, as it chanced, on the very next day something happened that for a time put the thought of Effie quite out of their heads.

CHAPTER V.

ITTLE DAVIE, you know, was the youngest of the Leighton children. He was seven years old, and he was but a little fellow for his age, and not very strong either, as well as not very big. For he had had a long illness once, which the doctors had thought he would never get over, and this had stopped his growth, and had been to him very like a year cut out of his short life. He was well enough now, and a bright happy little lad ; but even yet the mother used to watch him more anxiously than she watched her other children, and people used to shake their heads sometimes when they looked at him, and say softly that they hardly thought he would live to grow up.

They thought this, perhaps, because he was so small, and because he had grave eyes, and a gentle and rather

old-fashioned way of saying and doing things. He was the quietest of the three children, and though he had the greatest admiration for his brother Harry, and indeed quite made a pattern of him, yet somehow he was always behind the other two, and they used to laugh at him for being slow, and say that he went about as if he was asleep.

Effie had not taken very kindly to him. 'I like you ever so much better than Davie. Davie's stupid,' she had said in confidence to Harry a day or two after her arrival (thus giving Harry, of course, a very high opinion of her judgment); and, having made up her mind in this rapid manner, she did not give herself very much further trouble about him. Such a clever, sharp little girl as Effie had naturally the greatest contempt in the world for anything she thought slow or dull.

It was autumn weather, about the end of September, and the trees were all turning yellow, and the leaves falling; but it was a mild autumn, and in the sunshine the children used to ramble together out of doors for hours. Harry, indeed, was at school; he had his business there to attend to, and could not get much time for rambling, but the others only did lessons with

Mrs. Leighton ; and so when it was fine she often used to send them out, or go out with them, and they would spend such pleasant mornings amongst the fields and woods.

One day (it was the day after the father and mother had had that talk about Effie) the sun was shining brightly, and the mother said at breakfast,

‘We will have our lessons in the afternoon, little ones, if you would like to go out now. I must stay at home, for I have something to do, but you can go and play in the pine wood, or up upon the hill. It is nine o’clock, and you may stay, if you like, till twelve.’

Upon this the children ran away to get their hats and coats, and in a few minutes they set out, Effie and Meg trotting along together side by side, and David—as he often did—lagging just a yard or two behind.

Effie and Meg, you must know, were by this time great friends, and it would have surprised you to see how much they always seemed to have to say to one another. Indeed, Effie was a tremendous talker, and would really, I think, if she had been left to herself, have talked from morning to night ; for, you see, having

a great flow of words, and a great deal of cleverness, and no scruples about saying everything that came uppermost, it was a very easy thing for her little tongue to run on by the hour together, and not at all so wonderful and admirable as Meg thought it was, who had herself no especial gift for talking cleverly by any means, but was, indeed, in the matter of talking, as in most other things, not like Effie in the least, but simply like a hundred thousand other quiet, sensible, homely little maidens.

But yet, if she was not like Effie, at any rate she admired Effie immensely. She did not, it is true, think her cousin very good (she must have had very curious views about goodness if she had), but she thought she was the cleverest and most amusing little playfellow she had ever had in all her life, or ever hoped to have, and she was so charmed with her that she would have done almost anything in the world that Effie asked her, and would have spent all her time with her, if she could, from morning to night—which was very pretty devotion on poor little Meg's part, and very unselfish devotion too, for I don't know that, in return for it, Effie professed any admiration for Meg at all. Indeed, admiration of other

people was not a thing that Effie dealt much in at any time. What Effie liked was to be admired herself, and she had been used for so long to be admired, and to be told how clever she was, that she received all little Meg's enthusiasm quite coolly, as if it was a matter of course, and rarely, I must confess, took the trouble even to look as if she was grateful for it. In fact, to tell the whole truth, Meg not only got little gratitude from her cousin, but she often enough got barely civil treatment. Effie would say all sorts of rude things to her, and if at one moment she might choose to be gracious, and pet her and seem fond of her, in the very next she would perhaps be calling her names, and making her quite miserable by the contemptuous things she said. Meg sometimes felt it very hard ; but from the beginning of the world, you know, some people have been slaves, and some have been tyrants ; and the slaves, perhaps—though you may not think it—have not *always*, on the whole, had the worst of it.

On this particular morning that I am speaking of Effie was disposed to be very affectionate to Meg. They went along arm in arm, and Effie talked and talked. Effie was a great story-teller—I do not mean a teller of

lies (though she was that, too, you know), but she would weave long tales, and go on telling them day after day till you would think they never were coming to an end ; and sometimes they were very pretty tales, and so interesting and amusing that Meg would listen to them as eagerly as if she were reading from a fairy story-book. Only it was more delightful, she used to think, to listen to Effie than to read from any book, because, when anything came that she wanted explained, she could make Effie stop, and put questions to her ; and sometimes, when Effie was in a *very* good humour, she would even allow Meg to suggest that something in the story should be changed ; upon which Meg would feel so proud that now and then it would almost seem to her as if *she* was growing clever, and becoming able to make stories too (which was quite a mistake, of course, but yet for the moment it was very delightful to imagine it).

Little David, trotting along by himself, was not taken very much notice of by the other two.

‘Now, don’t you come listening ; we don’t want *you*,’ Effie had said to him, pretty sharply, near the begin-

ning of their walk ; and Davie, who had run up alongside, and had been trying for a few minutes to open his ears and follow the story that Effie was telling, had upon this dropped behind again quite meekly (for he was a gentle little lad, and had already got very well accustomed to be snubbed by his clever cousin), and had begun to amuse himself in his own way, gathering wild flowers and grasses, and lingering to watch the little living things that were near—insects at work upon the earth, and birds up in the trees, or here and there a bright-eyed hare crouching in the brushwood or amongst the fallen leaves. Davie was fond of all these things, and knew a great deal more about them than any of the other children did, and could have told you pretty stories, too, in his own way, if you had talked to him, about beasts and birds and flowers.

Only to-day, at any rate, nobody cared to talk to him. The two girls were quite wrapped up in one another—Effie talking, and Meg listening, with no thought to bestow on anything except themselves ; and so little Davie rambled on and on, till at last, when the other two children, getting tired, sat down on the moss

beneath a big old tree, he wandered away fairly out of sight, and if they had listened they might have heard the little feet making the fallen leaves rustle further and further off, till gradually at last the sound died quite away.

But they did not notice this; their two little heads were both so full of Effie's story. It was really a most delightful story—the prettiest one, Meg thought, that Effie had ever told. It was all about a beautiful princess who was enchanted by a naughty fairy, and who went through such amazing and heartrending adventures that it was no wonder little Meg was breathless as she sat and listened to them, for they were enough to make one's hair stand on end. Meg listened with great eyes, and was so interested and absorbed that it was only after Effie had got to the very last sentence of her story, and had made the delightful announcement that, the wicked fairy being completely vanquished, 'everybody was happy for ever after,' that she woke slowly up with a sigh to the business of this poor common world again, and thought suddenly to herself for the first time, 'I wonder what o'clock it is.' and then (this was her next

thought) 'Oh dear, I wonder what has become of Davie !'

Well, Davie was out of sight—that much was quite certain ; he had been out of sight for—Meg could not well say how long. She got up quickly, with a little sudden sharp uneasy feeling that she had not been doing right. She knew very well that when she went out with Davie her mother expected her to look after him, and take care that he did not come to any harm, and she knew very well that to-day she had not been thinking of Davie, nor taking care of him one bit.

'Davie ! where are you ?' she began to call, in a half impatient, half frightened way ; but nobody answered, and there was no sound except of the birds singing in the trees.

'Oh, he's somewhere about, I dare say,' Effie said carelessly, sitting still upon the ground. 'I say, Meg, if you and I and Harry get out again this afternoon, I'll tell you another story—and a better one than this.'

'Will you? Oh, that will be delightful ; but—but I wish I could see Davie,' Meg replied, in rather a distressed way. 'How stupid of him to go out of sight

just when we have to be going home. Davie, you tiresome boy! Davie!' she began to call again; but still with just the same result as before.

'He must be hiding somewhere; I never knew such a troublesome child! I must go and look for him,' she said then.

'I am sure *I* am not going to look for him,' Effie announced coolly. 'I dare say he has gone home.'

'Oh! do you think he has?' Meg said hopefully.

'I think it's very likely,' said Effie. 'At any rate, I wouldn't bother myself about him, I know.'

'But I ought to have looked after him,' Meg said ruefully.

'I don't see that. He's a tiresome little thing. He ought to have stayed where we could see him,' said Effie.

'Yes, of course he *ought*,' said Meg, doubtfully.

'And I dare say he has just gone away to tease us. *I* wouldn't go looking about for him,' exclaimed Effie.

'Oh, but I think I must,' answered Meg.

And then, as Effie said no more, Meg left her and began her search.

But she walked this way, and she walked that way, and she called as loud as she could, and still she could neither see nor hear anything of Davie. Effie, who got tired of sitting by herself and holding her tongue, got up and went after her at the end of a quarter of an hour or so, and found her looking quite frightened, and with the tears ready, as soon as she began to speak, to start to her eyes.

‘I can’t see anything of him ; I can’t *think* where he has gone !’ she exclaimed, as soon as she caught sight of Effie, and she gave something almost like a sob—at which Effie burst out laughing.

‘Oh, you little goose ! Didn’t I tell you he had gone home !’ she said. ‘Of *course* he has gone home ! I never knew such a baby ! Do you want *me* to cry too ?’ And then Effie put on such a ridiculous face that Meg through her tears began to laugh.

‘I suppose we had better go home and see if he is there,’ she said after this, a little more cheerfully. ‘I think he must have gone home—don’t you ? but yet it’s a shame of him if he has, the tiresome little thing ! and mamma will be angry, too, because I—I didn’t—look—

look after him,' said Meg, with her voice all in a tremble again.

'Oh, yes; and that will be a dreadful thing, won't it? Mammy's going to make it cry; put its finger in its eye!' exclaimed Effie in her naughty mocking way; and then there followed a little skirmish (not worth describing), which helped for a time to relieve the way, and divert Meg's thoughts, as the children bent their steps homewards.

It was a walk of rather more than a mile; and, though she did all she could to persuade herself that she was not frightened, it was not a comfortable walk to Meg. She knew that at the best she had done wrong to let Davie out of her sight; and that, even supposing he was all safe at home now, her mother would be vexed with her for her neglect, and would feel that in future she could not trust her; and this was alone enough to make her unhappy; but when, beyond this, there was the far greater fear that Davie might *not* be safe at home, you may imagine that poor little Meg was anything but easy, and felt her heart at last beating so wildly when, at the end of her walk, on opening the garden gate, she saw



IT SEEMED TO HER AS IF A GREAT KNOT

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her mother standing in the sunshine before the house, busy with the flowers (but no Davie with her !), that when Mrs. Leighton turned round and spoke to her, it seemed to her as if a great knot was coming up into her throat.

‘Why, children, I was thinking of coming to look for you ; it is past one o’clock,’ the mother said. ‘And where is Davie ?’ she asked quickly.

There was no answer to this question for a moment, and then Meg, with all the blood flushing into her face, said stammering,

‘Is—is he not here ?’

‘Here ?’ Mrs. Leighton repeated. ‘How could he be here ? You took him with you.’ And she hurriedly threw down her gardening tools, and stood straight up, looking at Meg.

‘Yes,—but—but we lost sight of him,’ said Meg faintly.

‘When did you lose sight of him ? Why did you come home without looking for him ?’ Mrs. Leighton exclaimed.

‘We did look for him a—a little,’ Meg said.

‘And you could not find him ? Meg ! Meg !’ Mrs.

Leighton cried, and suddenly looked at her with a look that Meg never afterwards forgot. It made her burst into tears as she saw it.

‘Mamma, I am so sorry ! We thought he must have come home. We were talking, and—and—we didn’t notice him !’ she sobbed, and held out her poor little beseeching hands to her mother to pray for forgiveness.

But it was no moment for Mrs. Leighton to think of forgiving ; she could not think of Meg or Meg’s sorrow at all.

‘Stay here while I put on my bonnet,’ she merely said hurriedly, ‘and then come back with me, and show me where you were when you saw him last.’

And then she went into the house ; and in two minutes afterwards Meg, still sobbing, but trying hard to swallow her sobs, was walking, with her poor little heart aching, by her mother’s side back to the wood.

They went along almost without speaking a word, and at a little distance behind them Effie followed, partly out of curiosity, and partly because she had nothing better to do, but also partly, I think, because she too at last was a little frightened, and would have been glad and re-

lieved to catch sight of Davie again. He was all right enough somewhere, she had no doubt, she said to herself ; but still, for all that, she kept her eyes very widely opened when she got into the wood again, and peered this way and that as they walked on, and once or twice felt her heart beat suddenly rather quickly when some sound reached her that she thought for a moment was Davie's voice. And then presently too—for you know she had a lively imagination—she began to conjure up stories to herself of what might possibly have happened to him,—of how he might have been stolen by gipsies, or hidden in a cave by some wild beast (if there *were* wild beasts in this wood, which there were not generally supposed to be), or taken by fairies, perhaps (if there really *were* fairies, a matter as to which nobody seemed quite certain), and of how he might never be seen by anybody who belonged to him any more ; and as Effie thought these things rather a creepy feeling came over her, and she quickened her steps to get nearer to the other two, for it seemed eerie to be alone with such wild fancies.

As for those other two, they got to the place where

Davie had last been seen, and then Mrs. Leighton searched and called, and searched and called, but all in vain. The poor mother as yet hardly knew how much she feared. She perceived that her child had strayed somewhere, but she would hardly let herself believe that he could be in much danger. There was no water about the place, she was thankful to remember; she was not afraid, like Effie, of fairies or wild beasts; she tried to persuade herself that he had perhaps only got tired—for he was a delicate little fellow, you know—and fallen somewhere asleep.

But yet she knew that it was strange and hardly likely that he should have fallen asleep, and the longer she wandered up and down the more alarmed she began to get. She had hoped that she should find the child almost at once, and bring him home; now every minute seemed to make her chance of finding him less, and her heart began to sink, and turn sick.

She had hardly spoken to Meg since they had left the house, except a very few words now and then, but at last she stood still and said suddenly,

‘Girls, go home. You are no use to me here, but you

can make yourselves of use if you go and send some one in your place. Your father will not be home yet, but go as quickly as you can to John Leeson, and tell him to come to me here. Or no—not here. Wait a moment.' And then she stopped suddenly, and all at once her face changed as if with a new thought. 'Tell him to come to the old quarry,' she said. 'And now go—go fast!' And as they turned round and went away (for neither of them ventured to object, or to say a word: they were too frightened to say anything) she herself began to go quickly forward in the direction in which this quarry lay.

It was an old unused quarry, a fine place for children to play in and scramble about—a pretty place too, half overgrown as it was now with grass and ferns and brush-wood. But the Leighton children did not go there often, because it was a good way from their house, and an expedition to it was always looked upon as something of a treat—a thing to be prepared for with slices of cake or sandwiches. It had suddenly struck Mrs. Leighton that little David might have wandered away to this quarry, and have been so happy there amongst his stones and weeds that he had forgotten all about the time. He was

a dreamy little fellow : he might easily have forgotten how late it was getting. One day, not so very long ago, he had been known to watch beside an ant hill for three hours together, without ever thinking of anything except the ants ; and as the mother remembered this she began to grow hopeful again, and she hurried on more and more quickly, almost persuading herself as she went that, as soon as she reached the quarry, she should see her little lad—should find him perhaps happily sitting in the sunshine, playing with his wild flowers.

But when she got to the quarry there was no little Davie there. She could not see the whole of the quarry at once, but she stood at a point from which the greater part of it was visible, and she called again and again, ‘ Davie ! Davie ! ’ and there came no answer. Then she began to search round and round, and there was no sign of him. The whole place was quite quiet, lying open and still in the bright autumn sun—no pattering of little feet anywhere—no sound of the little childish voice that the poor mother felt at that moment she would give half her life to hear. She had not allowed herself to be thoroughly frightened until now, but now there came to her

a feeling terrible of desolateness and agony. She was all alone ; she did not know what to do next ; there was no one to speak a word of comfort to her. 'My boy ! my boy !' she began to sob to herself.

She did not want to go far from the quarry again, because, you know, she had appointed the gardener John Leeson to meet her there ; so for a little while she went walking backwards and forwards, trying to think and arrange in her mind what should be done, listening every few moments, stopping again and again to call,—once or twice having her heart set beating by some sound which she thought for an instant was a step that might be David's step amongst the trees. Once she looked at her watch, and found that it was past three o'clock. In three hours more it would be growing dark—and if before dark she had not found her little lad—!

She began to cry to God to help her. Other mothers had lost their children, and had never found them living—had never, sometimes, found them, either living or dead—again. She felt (as people often feel at first when some great trouble is coming to

them) as though, if this should happen to her, she *could* not bear it,—as though it would break her heart. She felt almost desperate as she thought of it, as if, in some way, though she could not see in what way, she must lay down her life to save her boy's.

She was suffering like this, when suddenly at last, from some place near her, as it seemed—though she could see nothing near—there came a sound ; not a voice like any voice she knew, but a strange sound of moaning. She was not quite close to the quarry when she heard it, but perhaps some fifty yards away, at a spot where the ground was hilly, and broken up by great boulders of loose stone that had been flung out there for some purpose long ago and left to bed themselves as they could in the sandy soil. It was a desolate-looking bit of ground, and that wail came from the midst of it like the wail of an animal in pain. It was more like that than any human sound ; but yet the poor mother's heart gave a great bound as she heard it, and she sprang forward ; she hardly knew what she hoped or what she feared ; she only knew that something that had life in it was near her, and that that living thing might be her child.

And she was right. It *was* her child; in a few seconds more she found him; it was little Davie lying helpless on his back, with a great block of fallen stone across his chest.

She made one spring to where he was. She was a slight woman—not strong at all—not able generally to move heavy weights; but, quick as lightning, she put her hands to that big fragment of rock, and put out all her might in a kind of frenzy, and—never thinking of her own weakness, knowing only that she must save her child or die—she half lifted the stone in her arms, half rolled it from him, as if, instead of being feeble as she was, she had had the strength of half-a-dozen men. She rolled it back, and then she threw herself beside him, and threw her arms out over him, with a great cry as if her heart would break.

He had been lying with his poor eyes shut, almost insensible, just having life enough left in him to give out that feeble moan; but for a moment, as the stone moved, the eyes had started wide, and the lips had parted with a great gasp of pain. The poor mother saw that gasp and quiver as the heavy weight ground itself over the wounded breast. Do you wonder that she cried out?

—that she felt as if the stone had been cutting her own flesh?

He had looked in her face, but she did not think he knew her. He did not hear her as she sobbed over him, crying—‘My little Davie!—my little child!’ She had put one of her arms beneath his head, and raised it up a little from the ground, and had laid her cheek upon the poor white cheek,—but she dared do nothing more. She did not dare to take up the crushed broken body into her arms. She touched him once, with a yearning and hunger to do it, but as she touched him all the poor flesh quivered and shrank. There was nothing that she could do till help came, and she had to sit still and wait for it.

His eyes had closed again, and he was breathing with little short painful gasps. She folded up her shawl beneath his head, and went away once, and with some difficulty found a little water, and brought some to him in the hollow of her hand, but, though she put it on his face and touched his lips with it, it did not rouse nor seem to comfort him. She spoke to him too, murmuring over him all sorts of loving

passionate words,—calling him by his pet names, kissing his face, and sweeping back the hair from his forehead with her soft hands. But he never looked at her again, nor seemed to know her. He was just alive—no more; and she sat there, with his head upon her knees, thinking that perhaps while she sat so she should see him die.

She had to wait alone for nearly an hour—a long terrible hour. Again and again as the slow minutes passed she tried to make up her mind to leave him, and run to the nearest place from which she could get help,—but she *could* not make up her mind to do this. She thought of what it would be if she were to go, and if while she were away he were to die, till she did not dare to stir from where she sat,—till she scarcely dared to take her eyes away from the little white face. And so she waited, till at last in the silence (for it was very silent,—even the birds hardly singing here, and only the sweet quiet sunlight streaming over everything, as if there was no sorrow in the world), she heard the steps for which she had waited so long coming near.

It was her gardener whom she had sent for—a good kind man, who had worked for the Leightons since before David had been born, and who, when he came up now, and saw the little lifeless-looking face lying on its mother's knees, burst out crying like a child. For all the servants about the place had been fond of little Davie, and this man, who had young children of his own, the fondest of them all perhaps. Long afterwards Mrs. Leighton used to speak—though she never could do it with a steady voice—of how he had gone down on his knees by her boy's side, sobbing at the sight of him as he might have sobbed over his own child.

But it was no moment to waste much time in crying. They wanted a surgeon, and some means of carrying the boy home, and in two minutes Leeson was on his feet again, and hurrying at his utmost speed to a village that was about a mile away. No assistance could be got nearer than this, and again the mother had to spend a bitter weary time of waiting, during which she could do nothing but watch her child's face and pray to God.

But at last the help reached her for which she was so sick at heart. The doctor came first, and then other men came with a shutter and a mattress and pillows, and the doctor cut open the little clothes and looked at the bruised body, and felt and probed it till the closed lips parted and quivered, and the poor mother cried out with pain. And when he had done this he said very little, but only skilfully and tenderly lifted the child in his arms, and laid it on the bed that had been made, and ordered the men to begin their walk slowly and steadily home.

They had a long way—nearly three miles—to go.

‘Will he be able to bear it? Had you not better take him to Croylands?’ (this was the village that was nearer) Mrs. Leighton asked anxiously, as they were about to start. But the surgeon replied quietly—

‘No, it will not make much difference : we had better get him home.’

And so they went home,—the men carrying the litter with kind and gentle care, and the poor mother through those three long miles walking by its side. I need not try to tell you what a terrible walk it was to her. People some-

times hardly know when a dreadful thing is past how they were able to bear it. They only know that somehow, at the time, God gave them strength to endure, and to be quiet and calm.

Little David was breathing still when they got him home, and laid him down at last on his own bed. He even opened his eyes, and looked up with something that was almost like a moment's consciousness as his mother bent over him. They had sent for a second surgeon, and when he came they put even Mrs. Leighton out of the room, and the two men stayed alone with the child for a long time. When they came out again at last, one of them held out his hand to Mrs. Leighton, who had been waiting all the while in the passage outside his door, and said cheerfully—

‘We will try to save him.’

‘Are you telling me the truth? Do you think it is possible?’ she said, when she could answer him. (She *could* not answer him at first—not for the first few moments.)

In reply he told her all he could, and described to her the injuries that had been done, and explained

where it was that the greatest danger lay. Her heart sank as she listened to what he said, but still at the end of it he repeated—

‘We will try to save him. I think we shall save him, with God’s help.’

Then they told her all that she would have to do ; and presently she went back again into the room where her little lad was lying,—and began the sad, sweet, anxious nursing that lasted after this for many a long long day.

CHAPTER VI.

FOR little Davie did not die. It was a wonderful thing presently, to see the life coming slowly back into that poor bruised and shattered body—to see with what delicate skill these kind surgeons tended him, setting the broken bones, and binding up the wounded flesh. When he could speak, he told them how he had wandered on and on that sad morning, till at last he had reached the quarry, and got amongst those boulders of stone ; and how, when he was there, he had found some pretty ferns (the fern leaves were still in his hand when his mother found him ; he had grasped them tight, and the little palm had never unclosed again), and there had been one fern in particular, that he had thought he should like to get up by the root and carry home, and so he had begun to pull

away at it—not very gently, nor in a way especially good for ferns, perhaps—leaning the while over that big stone that fell upon him, and was just getting it loosened from the soil when the stone, loosened too by his hold upon it, suddenly began to move, and before he could get out of its way (this was all he knew), down it rolled upon him, striking him and crushing him beneath it. He hardly remembered anything more after that, except a great pain for a few moments, and then a numbness creeping all over him ; and then he seemed, he said, to fall asleep.

‘ But I oughtn’t to have gone to the quarry when Meg had stayed so far behind,—and I’m very sorry, and I’ll never do it again, Mother dear,’ he said, when he told his story first, looking into his mother’s face, with the tears starting to his eyes.

It was a sorrowful house while the child lay in it between life and death. The voices of the other children were hushed, and even Effie was awed and subdued. Effie had felt something that she had never felt in all her life before when she had seen the sad little procession that brought Davie home coming

through the garden. She had thought when she saw it first that Davie was dead, and she had quite terrified Meg, who was with her, by the scream she gave, and by the wild way in which she threw herself upon the ground and hid her face. Meg, who cared for David a thousand times more than Effie did, never would have thought of showing *her* distress in such an amazing way. But, indeed, it was not so much distress that Effie felt as simply terror; she had never before seen anybody who was dead, and had never thought of death except as something that was dreadful and horrible; and so she screamed, not because she loved Davie, but as she would have screamed if she had seen a ghost. She was a foolish and ignorant little child, you know, and you ought only to be sorry for her. She had no idea that death can be so beautiful sometimes that the sight of a dead face is like the sight of something fresh from heaven.

This was the first thing that she did, and then for all the rest of that day she was curiously quiet. Even after she knew that Davie was *not* dead she had a strange feeling of fright and horror left, for she could not forget

the look of his face as she had seen it for a moment. It was not like David's face ; it was like nothing she had ever seen before. During all the evening, as she sat trying to read or sew, it seemed always to be coming back before her ; when she went to bed, even though she shut her eyes tight, she could not sleep nor keep from seeing it. The two children, Effie and Meg, as you may remember, occupied one room together, and generally there used to come from this room at bedtime a great deal more chattering than the mother liked to hear ; but on this night the little girls went each in a sort of awed silence to her bed, and half-an-hour after they had got there Effie came whispering to Meg's side, 'Meg, I want to sleep with you ; I can't go to sleep alone ;' and crept in beside her, and clasped her tight round with her arms. Poor Meg had been crying with remorse and grief till her eyes would not keep open any longer, and this proceeding of Effie's, just as she was beginning to drop asleep, startled her a little perhaps ; but she was a simple, warm-hearted little soul, and as she kissed her cousin, and began afresh to cry a few more last tears, I dare say it never occurred to her that Effie had only come

to share her bed because she was afraid to sleep alone. She thought probably that Effie had come just out of love and sympathy, because she was so sorry and miserable, as Meg herself was.

And, indeed, in a sort of way, Effie *was* sorry. You must not think that she was so utterly selfish that she did not care anything for what Davie was suffering. She did care ; only the feeling that was uppermost in her was not one of sorrow but of fear—a sort of vague strange, uncomfortable awe, that made her shrink from the sight of David's room, and from being alone, and from the quietness of the hushed house. It was the first time in her life that she had ever been near to people who were watching round a sick bed, and counting the slow hours, not knowing if they would end in life or death. It was the first time that the thought of a great illness had ever been brought home to her. She had always hitherto hated to hear of people being ill or dying, and had turned away from such thoughts as in her selfish, cowardly, childish way she had at all times, when it was possible, turned away from the contemplation of every painful thing ; but now *this* illness

had come so close to her that she could not turn away from it ; wrapped up in herself though she was, it had struck her like a blow, and she could not forget it, nor shake herself free from the vague dim horror of it.

They were strange painful days to her while Davie lay unseen in that closed room upstairs ; for, while they lasted, the child's lively imagination, unknown to anyone, conjured up for her all kinds of unnatural and far-fetched terrors. Harry and Meg grieved for their little brother with simple, common, honest grief, and everybody was sorry for them, and the servants petted and made much of them ; but nobody thought of making much of Effie, or supposed that she, as she went about with her dry eyes, was in any need of consolation ; and yet I think that in truth Effie suffered more perhaps than either Harry or Meg. For Harry's and Meg's suffering was wholesome and natural, but Effie's was the suffering of an imaginative, ignorant child, who believed in every kind of supernatural horror, and thought that dying was but the first step to becoming a ghost, and that every dark place was peopled with spirits. At all times Effie hated to be alone in the dark, but her dislike of it at ordinary times was a

slight thing compared with what it became during these nights when David was so ill. It was so great then that she used to lie awake for hours, terrified at the silence round her, and yet more terrified when she heard sounds in David's room ; thinking all kinds of dreadful things—thinking that perhaps Davie was dying at this moment,—that perhaps he was dead, and that his ghost would come into the room. One night her aunt, wanting something upstairs long after she supposed that both Effie and Meg were fast asleep, came up and softly opened their door as the moonlight was falling full upon it, and the child gave a scream that rang through the whole house. Her aunt merely thought that she had been sleeping, and that the opening door had startled her, and she said a few kind words, and tried to soothe her. But neither her aunt nor anyone else knew the real cause nor the depth of the child's fear.

Perhaps you think that Effie, such a wild, mischief-loving, flighty child as she was, would not be likely to take anything to heart, and brood over it so deeply as this. Well, you are wrong. Effie was hard and daring, and defiant in many things, but in some things she was,

a coward, and in some other things she was neither cowardly nor hard, but more full of feeling than most children are. Only, you see, the feeling for the most part was all wrong feeling as yet, and all turned in the wrong direction, so that it did more harm than good to her, and whether it would ever get turned right was one of the many questions for her that nobody up to this time could answer.

For more than a week did little Davie lie in that struggle between life and death. A terrible week it was to some in the house! Day and night his mother watched beside him, never knowing when each new day began whether he would live until the end of it, but yet bearing all her great anguish with such calm and quiet courage that the sight of her made everybody else around her more brave and patient.

It was the first time that Effie had ever seen anybody in great grief, and until now she had always supposed that people who were unhappy made a great show of their unhappiness, and went about crying, and letting everyone else see and hear that they were very miserable. But Mrs. Leighton made no show of *her*

grief, nor troubled anyone with her tears, and yet, somehow, the sight of her awed Effie more than if she had seen her crying all day long. For there was such a strange look about her, as if she had gone through something that had made all the world different—as if all the little things that had touched her before, or that she had been busy about before, had nothing to do with her now. Effie was fond of imagining things, you know, and it seemed to her that her aunt looked as if she had been dead, and had come to life again ;—‘Like Lazarus, you know,’ she said one day, trying to explain her views on the matter to Meg. But Meg, whose imagination was not accustomed to take such flights, could not in the least understand her. ‘How can mamma be like Lazarus?’ she merely answered rather indignantly, looking at Effie with wide-opened eyes.

And yet, perhaps, Effie in a sort of way was right, and it *was* into something like a new life that Mrs. Leighton had passed on that day when Davie’s illness began—a life that both seemed to blot out the remembrance of what had gone before it, and the thought of what was

to come after it. Those weary days were days that were full of suffering ; but yet, besides the suffering, there was something else in them too, for the sight of Davie's gentleness and patience made all the mother's anguish as she nursed him become mixed with peace and blessedness. I have told you before that he was the gentlest of all the children ; he had always been the easiest one amongst them to manage—a timid, trusting, affectionate child ; not without spirit, but yet so docile that when you made him love you you could lead him by a word or look, and so sensitive that he never did wrong but he was sorry for it afterwards with a kind of passionate sorrow that it almost hurt one to see.

He had been this sort of child always, and therefore you may imagine something of what he became now when he was ill. A more gentle loving little lad never drew breath in this world. It used sometimes to give the mother a feeling almost of terror to see his quiet patient face for hour after hour lying upon its pillow, so uncomplaining, and yet so white and piteous in its pain. He suffered so much at times that the sight of his suffering near broke her heart ; and yet he would lie the

whole day long, and never give an impatient murmur, nor utter a complaining word. He would almost always say that he was 'better,' when anyone asked him how he was. He had such a simple, trusting, childish faith in the tenderness and care of everyone about him, and in God's care over all.

I do not think that anyone could be wholly unhappy while nursing such a child as this ; and there were hours, even during these first terrible days, when the father and mother sat beside him, and felt that, whether this illness ended in life or death, it was well for *them*, for that on earth they should have the memory of him to remain always with them, and in heaven they should gain him back, never to lose him any more. They used to think this as they sat looking at the little pallid face that had become in their eyes half like an angel's face already—as if the world, that had never held him very fast, were silently and tenderly loosing its hold of him altogether now.

A good many days passed by before any of the other three children were allowed to see him. Perhaps nobody was thinking much of them ; perhaps the mother

thought that it was better both for them and for David that they should not come into his room. At any rate it was nearly a week after his accident before any of them saw him.

But one day at last (it was a day when he was very ill, and it might have been that in her heart the mother thought if she delayed longer they might never see the little lad any more alive) she came into the playroom where they were all together, with that strange quiet solemn look in her face that used to frighten Effie, and said to them, 'Children, I want you to come and look at Davie. He is half-asleep—you need not speak to him; but I should like you to come just for a minute into his room.' And then she held out her hand to Meg, who was nearest to her, and Meg rose up with the colour flushing to her face.

The children, as I said, were all together. Meg had been making doll's-clothes, Harry was at his lessons, Effie was drawing pictures on a sheet of paper. Effie was clever at drawing, as at most other things, and you could find no better way of keeping her out of mischief than to give her paper and pencil, and let her amuse

herself with them, which she would do by the hour together, making really pretty pictures sometimes. She used to draw all the princes and princesses and knights and fairies of her stories, after she had told them to Meg, and represent the principal scenes in their histories quite cleverly.

She had been drawing now, and she looked up from her drawing with a startled look as her aunt spoke. She was an inquisitive child, but she was a very cowardly child too. With one half of her heart she eagerly desired to see David, that she might satisfy her curiosity about him, but with the other half she shrank from seeing him. She looked up hurriedly, and her lips went apart. Her first and strongest impulse when the others rose was to say she would not go, for it gave her a feeling of horror that you would scarcely believe to think of suddenly seeing Davie again.

But the other two got up, and then it almost seemed as if she had no choice left but to get up too, and she rose, and followed them out of the room, slowly and unwillingly, and with a half-feeling as if she should like to turn round and run away. And yet she almost knew

that if she *had* run away she would have been sorry for it. Her heart was beating fast with fear and a kind of vague awe and dread, and yet she was burning with curiosity to see with her own eyes what went on in David's room, and above all to see how David looked.

The little procession took its way in silence, and when the mother reached the sick-room she went in and beckoned the rest to follow her, and they did so, Harry, and Meg with sheepish solemn faces (for it is wonderful how shy of one another illness makes people sometimes), and Effie with the colour gone from her cheeks, and her great eyes as round as saucers.

They went to the side of the bed, and stood there, all three close together, in a little silent group. Davie was lying on his back (he had to lie on his back always), quite quiet, with his eyes almost closed, and the little face as white as death. He was breathing as if it hurt him to breathe, not evenly, but in short feeble pants, with his lips parting now and then, as if in sudden pain. The mother had said that he was nearly asleep, but you could not have told from the look of him whether he was asleep or dying : he seemed to have so

little life left in him that you could imagine if sleep came it might pass on softly into death, without his ever awakening.

He did not open his eyes as the children stood there looking at him. They had come very quietly in, and when they were once in they never moved nor spoke ; there was none of the three who would have found it easy to speak ; not Harry, who felt as if he had a knot in his throat ; nor Meg, whose lip was trembling and the tears running down her cheeks ; nor even Effie, glib as she usually was. They only stood still and looked at him, till poor little Meg from tears began to come to sobs, and then the mother put her finger on her lip, and signed to them to follow her again out of the room.

‘ My little Meg, you must not let him see you crying,’ she said in her quiet way when they were in the passage once more, and she had closed the door ; and then she laid her hand on the child’s shoulder, and—‘ I did not bring you here to make you sorry, Meg,’ she said, ‘ but that you might be glad—afterwards—perhaps.’

She said the last two words with a little break in her voice, and she stooped down next moment and kissed

Meg, and then turned away. She did not speak to the others—neither to Harry with the knot in his throat, nor to Effie with her round big eyes. And not a word did the children say either, but went back silently to the playroom they had left, each one with his or her own thoughts.

In the cases of Harry and Meg these thoughts were very simple ones.

‘He would never be lying like that if it had not been for me. Oh, I wish I could die to make him well again!’ was what poor little Meg was thinking; and when she got back to the playroom she could restrain herself no longer, but fairly burst out sobbing.

‘I don’t know how he can bear it at all. He must be a great deal better than I am. I think he always *was* the best of the lot of us—ever so much—though we did laugh at him,’ thought Harry, and went back to his lessons, and tried to go on learning them, and couldn’t.

But as for Effie, I cannot tell you a quarter of the things that came into *her* mind as she sat, not doing her drawing any more, but crowded up in a little heap upon the window-seat, looking out to where the sun was

shining on the autumn leaves, and on the bright colours of the autumn flowers down in the garden beneath.

She sat with her great eyes looking out straight before her, but yet scarcely seeing anything, for she was not thinking of trees or flowers or sunshine, but of Davie, and that little sad white face of his. It was not a face to frighten anybody. Effie had been afraid of it for nearly a week, but she felt that now it was too beautiful to frighten her. It was like a face, she thought, that she had seen once, long ago, cut in marble in a church—a child's face, or perhaps an angel's, with wings lying folded across the breast. Would Davie, too, she wondered, if he died, be cut in marble like that child, and put here in the church, where there were other monuments, but none like that. It might be rather nice, Effie thought ; but yet she shuddered a little too as she thought of it. It would be an eerie thing to lie alone in the church when nobody was there—all in the cold through the long winter nights. Effie shivered and hugged herself close together as she sat in the broad window-seat. Why should Davie die instead of getting well again? It was so dreadful to die ! Why shouldn't God let Davie get well ?

Effie was a vain and presumptuous little monkey. She liked to have a hand in everything that was going on, and to think that she was able to do everything. She began as she sat here to set her busy little brain to work to conceive of something that *she* might do for Davie—some wonderful thing that nobody else had thought of—something that should be better than what anybody else was able to do. I can't say that she decided on what this amazing thing should be (great geniuses like Effie are sometimes more fond of planning things in a large general way than of entering into particulars about them), but a great many valuable ideas about it came floating into her mind as she sat on the window-seat facing the sun, and the more she thought, the more ardent she became to be up and doing—*what* she could not tell, but at any rate *something*.

Suppose, she thought, when everybody imagined Davie to be dying, she should come with some medicine that she had got from some one, or that a fairy had given her, or that she had made herself, and should give it to Davie, and on the instant he should spring up with all his broken bones mended! Or, if she could not get the

medicine (and, on reflection, it must be confessed that she perceived there might be some difficulty in procuring it—for these life-giving medicines are found, I believe, for the most part only in fairy stories, and not in chemists' shops), suppose her aunt should be obliged to go away, and the servants in her absence should not do what they ought to do, and Effie should find out that Davie was neglected, and that instead of leaving him to the bad nurses and people about him, she should shut herself up with him in his room, and lock the door, and nurse him all by herself till her aunt came back, and then bring him out to her well and able to walk ! Or suppose some night there should be a dreadful fire in the house, and, when everybody was too frightened to know what they were about, she—who would be the only person with her senses quite collected—should rush to Davie's room, and take him up in her arms, and carry him downstairs through the flames and smoke—getting all her hair burnt off, or her legs broken, or her arms dislocated, perhaps, in doing it—and should carry him out in triumph into the midst of a great crowd of people

who would be gathered on the lawn, all too frightened to be able to do anything of the least use, and who, of course, would receive her with a great burst of cheering! This would be delightful, indeed. 'Oh! I *wish* I could do this!' thought Effie, quite carried away by the heroic idea, and failing at the moment to perceive that, Davie being so ill already, it really seemed a pity to expose him to a fresh accident of so serious a nature, especially as it was difficult to perceive how the conflagration should at all aid in bringing about his ultimate cure, which appeared to be the benevolent object that Effie had in view. This little defect in the plan, however, probably did not strike Effie, who at the moment was in rather an excited state. She was quite engrossed in thinking how delightful it would be to save Davie before so many people, and to do what nobody else should be able to do. As for the chances that poor little shattered Davie might die under her hands while she was engaged in hauling him out of the house—she never considered that.

I daresay you will suppose that Effie was a sad

little goose to go on thinking in this way—and indeed she *was* a goose ; but yet even to think foolishly of other people besides herself was better than not to think of other people at all, which was her usual habit. She was very silly indeed—there is no doubt at all of that—very silly and very vain ; but yet I think she made at least a first step towards better things to-night as she sat curled up on the window-seat in the autumn sunlight, wondering how she could do some good to Davie. And—vain, too, as she was—I even think it was something more than mere love of self-glorification that made her desire to do good to him ; and that there was some other feeling mixed with her vanity—a feeling that came into her heart when she first looked at Davie lying on his little bed, and that came back to her each time she thought again of the white quiet face that was like that other face in marble in the church. It was something to be said for Effie that that gentle face had touched her. I am not sure with all her badness, that the sight of it had not moved her more than it had moved either Harry or Meg.

CHAPTER VII.

YOU may remember that before his illness Effie had had no very high opinion of her cousin David. David was slow and dreamy, and slowness and dreaminess had seemed a pair of most contemptible qualities to clever Effie. But now that David was in such a changed position—now that he had become something set apart from the others, and that it seemed natural for him in all respects to be different from them—somehow now Effie began to forget her old opinion, and to give up sneering at the recollection that he had never been as merry as Meg, nor as active as Harry, nor as sharp and bright as she was herself. From even the first day of his accident, indeed, the old Davie had seemed in some respects mysteriously to pass away: he had become

something more important to her by a great deal during those days in which all the house had been filled with solemn sadness on account of him, and during those nights when she had lain trembling in her bed, breathless with the fear of seeing his ghost : she had ceased to despise him even before this evening when Mrs. Leighton took her to his bedside.

And now from this evening another change came to her, and the active-minded, excitable child began from the time of this first visit to let her mind become filled, not with any feeling of affection for Davie, but with an absorbing interest and curiosity that led her to spend half her days in vain endeavours to see him, and in stealthy watches near his room. That first sight of him had taken away the horror with which she had thought of him after his accident, and now, with that feeling gone, she gave herself up to her natural spirit of inquisitiveness, and morning, noon, or night you might have come upon her lingering in the passage, or hanging about the stairs, or peeping, silent as a mouse, into Davie's room, whenever it happened that the door was left ajar. In doing all this

she still felt a certain amount of fear and awe, but it was only so much as to give a pleasant relish to her employment, and keep the time she spent upon it from becoming wearisome.

You see, the house was dull—that was the secret at the root of Effie's interest. The house was dull, and Effie did not like dullness. It was not in her nature to sit dolefully down as Meg sat, and simply look miserable. She must do something, and in some way make an occupation for herself. So, as there was nothing else out of which to make an occupation, she made it out of Davie—out of Davie, who had been wholly uninteresting to her once, and who had frightened her once, but who now, since she had seen him, was neither uninteresting nor frightful to her any more—who was only, in a sort of creepy but yet half-pleasant way, rather mysterious, and good for dreaming about, and making stories of, and in a general way filling up her time with. In fact, Davie was a sort of peg upon which Effie's lively imagination began to hang all sorts of things.

It happened, too, that a week or so after she had first

seen Davie she was thrown very much upon her own companionship, for there came a letter to Mrs. Leighton from a lady in Devonshire, who was Meg's godmother, asking that Meg might go and stay with her for a month or two. 'You must have so much upon your hands,' the lady wrote, 'that I am sure it will be good for you to get one of the children out of your way, and I have seen nothing of Meg for a long time, so pray let her come to me. I would ask you to send Harry too, only I suppose it would be out of the question for Harry to leave school.'

'I wish she had asked for Effie, rather than Meg,' Mr. Leighton said when he read this invitation; 'it would be a relief to get *her* away, poor little thing.'

'Yes, that would be a relief, certainly,' Mrs. Leighton answered; 'and yet I must say for Effie that she has not been giving any trouble since David has been ill. If she only goes on as she is doing at present, I shall be able to manage with her very well, and it will be all the easier if Meg is away, so we had better let her go. They are more likely to get into mischief if they are together than if Effie remains here alone.'

So it was settled that Meg was to go, and in a few

days more they sent her off. Poor little Meg had been sadly depressed from the time of Davie's accident, for she could not help feeling, and feeling rightly, that if it had not been for her neglect he would never probably have come to such grief, and her doleful little face had been quite a sad sight in the house. She had been allowed several times since she had first seen him to go in again, and stay for a little while in the sick-room, but I don't think David had found these visits of hers very cheering. Indeed, as she always began to cry, after she had looked at him for a few minutes, Mrs. Leighton had soon come to the conclusion that the less she saw of David and the less David saw of her the better. So the mother was not sorry when this opportunity came for sending Meg out of the house, though the poor little maid herself looked very mournful over it, and went away at the end crying quite bitterly.

Little Davie, however, was beginning to be better before she went. One happy day the father and mother knelt by his bedside, thanking and blessing God. They did not know yet whether he would ever be able to stand or use his limbs again ; perhaps they hardly dared

to think of that ; they only knew that the doctors had said the worst was past, and that if all went on well now the little lad was likely to live. I suppose that this was blessing enough at first, and that, for a little while, the poor mother scarcely felt there was anything else for which she cared to ask.

Effie, I am afraid, was not quite as sorry as she ought to have been when Meg went away. Meg, you know, had been her chief friend in the house, and it was therefore, perhaps, to have been expected that she should have shed tears (as Meg herself, being in very low spirits, did abundantly) when she bade her good bye ; but I am shocked to say that she did not shed any tears at all.

‘ I don’t think you care a bit whether I am going or not,’ said Meg to her reproachfully.

‘ Oh yes, I do ; but you’ll soon come back again, you know,’ answered Effie, taking a highly prosaic view of the matter ; and when presently Meg kissed her with a face at the moment not well adapted for kissing, Effie took out her handkerchief and wiped off the dampness that Meg had communicated to her cheeks just as if she had been drying her face after washing it. Effie, you see, was not

a child by any means (except on very rare occasions) given to weeping.

And then at present, too, as you know, her head was very full of something else besides Meg. She had not time to concern herself much with Meg while there was David to think of and watch and make stories about. 'Oh yes, I'm sorry,' said Effie ; but I don't at all wonder that Meg thought it was a sort of sorrow that didn't count for much. It certainly troubled Effie very little indeed.

She had had by this time one or two interviews with Davie besides that first one. On one of these occasions her aunt had brought her in to see him, and that meeting had been marked by great propriety of behaviour on both sides, Effie standing in silence and staring at David, and David lying and staring at her ; and the effect had been edifying perhaps, but not enlivening : on another occasion, however, Effie had made her own way into the room, and this interview had been of a far more cheerful and entertaining character.

It took place one afternoon when Mrs. Leighton had been called out of the sick-room, and Davie, by a rare chance, was for ten minutes or so left alone. The oppor-

tunity was one not to be lost, and Effie, who was not far off, and saw that the coast was clear, instantly, as soon as her aunt was out of sight, betook herself on tiptoe to the door.

Mrs. Leighton had left it a little open—just an inch or two.

‘I’ll push it a little further, and creep in and out again, and nobody will be a bit the wiser,’ thought Effie to herself, and gave the door a gentle touch, and then another and another, till it was wide enough open for her to put in her head. She paused for a moment then to listen, but all was quite still, so she cautiously thrust her head through the opening, and then—finding that a curtain was drawn across the foot of the bed, and that she could see nothing unless she advanced further—in she stole softly, as if she were treading on egg-shells, with her heart beating a good deal, and her head craned forward.

‘I’ll just look at him for one minute. I daresay he’ll be asleep and won’t see me,’ said Effie confidently to herself; but when she got round to the side of the bed the first thing she saw was David, no more asleep than she was herself, but with his eyes wide open, looking full at her.

‘Oh!’ cried Effie, hurriedly, rather taken aback by this sight, and she made so rapid a retreat, and disappeared behind the curtain with such velocity that it must have been rather startling to David, unless, indeed, as I think from what followed is not unlikely, he thought that she had come to play bo-peep, for after she vanished there was a moment’s silence, and then there came a little laugh, and a tiny feeble voice called—‘Effie!’ in the silence.

It was the smallest voice that you can conceive, so that it was really a chance that Effie heard it, but she was standing quite still behind the curtain, listening so keenly that she did. ‘Effie!’ she heard faintly, and then a little movement, as if perhaps he was trying to stretch out his head to see her; and then her curiosity would let her stay hidden no longer, and out she came again.

‘Hush! it’s only me. I wouldn’t have come, only I didn’t think you’d see me,’ she said, in a rapid whisper, as she advanced. ‘I thought you’d have your eyes shut.’

‘Oh!’ said Davie, hesitatingly, not finding this speech quite intelligible, perhaps.

‘You had before, you know,’ said Effie, ‘but I suppose you’re getting better now, are you? I say, Davie’—and here Effie, suddenly resolving to make the most of her opportunity, came a little nearer, with a look of intense curiosity on her face—‘I say, Davie, I wish you would tell me, for I can’t think—I wish you would tell me how—how it feels.’

‘How *what* feels?’ asked Davie, not quite knowing what she meant.

‘To be like—that,’ said Effie, pointing at him.

‘Oh, I don’t know,’ answered Davie, rather bashfully, for the enquiry, you see, was so very personal.

‘But I mean—is it horrid?’ said Effie, becoming more precise.

‘Oh yes, it’s rather horrid,’ said Davie gently.

‘And are you all—all in a smash?’ said Effie, under her breath, but thinking probably, in spite of her awe, that plain speaking was best, especially as her time was likely to be so short, and pointing again with her forefinger at his breast.

‘No!’ answered Davie, a little indignantly. ‘No! I’m not in a smash. I’m—*hurt*.’

‘But nurse said you *were* in a smash; she did,’ persisted Effie. ‘She said you were in a smash all over.’

‘Well, but I’m *not*,’ remonstrated Davie plaintively.

‘You may be, though, without knowing it,’ said Effie.

‘People don’t always know things about themselves.’

Davie seemed disposed to let this assertion pass, conscious, perhaps, of the deep wisdom contained in it, and there was a moment or two’s silence, which Effie, however, soon broke.

‘Well, I had better be going, I suppose,’ she said, ‘or somebody will come, and then I shall catch it. But if you like I’ll come again some other time. Shall I?’

‘Ye-es, if you don’t mind,’ said Davie, a little dubiously.

‘Oh, *I* don’t mind,’ answered Effie graciously. ‘It’s not—it’s not half as bad as I used to think it would be. I was afraid before I first came that you would look so—so horrid, you know,’ she said confidentially.

‘Oh!’ said David; but he scarcely seemed to appreciate the compliment.

‘Like a ghost, or—something,’ explained Effie, going into particulars.

‘Nurse says I *do* look like a ghost,’ said Davie, with perhaps a little natural pride.

‘I don’t believe nurse ever *saw* a ghost,’ cried Effie, contemptuously. ‘At least, she has told *me* she never did.’

‘She may know what they are like, though,’ suggested Davie, not quite willing to yield the point.

‘Oh, well, I suppose she may know *that*,’ said Effie carelessly, as if the question was one too mean for discussion; ‘but you don’t look like a ghost to *me*.’

‘Don’t I? I haven’t seen myself,’ said Davie meekly.

‘What! never seen yourself at all?’ cried Effie.

‘No,’ said Davie, ‘not since I have been ill.’

‘Dear me! wouldn’t you like to? Look here,’ exclaimed Effie, quite eagerly, ‘there’s nobody coming; I could fetch the glass in a moment.’ And she skipped without further delay across the room to get it. You can’t sit up, I suppose?’ she said speculatively, pausing an instant before she grasped it.

‘Oh no, I can’t sit up,’ said Davie, ‘and—it’s rather big—don’t you think—’

But Effie had got the glass already in her arms.

‘Oh, it’s all right. I can carry it beautifully. Now, just lift up your head as much as you can,’ she said, ‘and you’ll see. No, no—lift it up!’

‘But I can’t,’ said David plaintively.

‘Can’t lift up your head?’

‘No, I can’t do anything,’ said Davie.

‘Dear me!’ exclaimed Effie, with scarcely concealed contempt. ‘Well then,’ after a moment, ‘I’ll put the glass so. Now can you see?’

‘N—o, I can’t see much,’ answered Davie. ‘I think if you were to tilt it a little more——’

‘Like that?’

‘That’s better. I can see the top of my head now,’ said Davie hopefully.

‘Look—I’ll tell you what I’ll do. I’ll lift your head up,’ cried Effie, seized with a brilliant idea.

‘Oh no, Effie, you can’t!’ exclaimed Davie, alarmed.

‘I *can’t*!’ said Effie scornfully. ‘See if I can’t!’

And, without stopping to listen to any further remonstrance, she made a bold plunge at the pillow, and did something—I hardly know what, nor did she—but the result was disastrous, for Davie screamed, with a loud crash

the glass fell down upon the floor, and the next instant hurried steps were heard on the stairs, and before Effie could escape, or hide herself, or collect her senses, the nurse was in the room, holding her by the arm, and shaking her.

‘Miss Effie, what are you doing? Who brought you here? You naughty, naughty child, do you want to be the death of your cousin?’ cried the angry nurse.

Effie’s heart, to tell the truth, was going pit-a-pat. Davie’s sharp cry of pain had frightened her, and the sight of the broken looking-glass had startled her a good deal too; but, as she usually did whenever she was found out in a scrape, she only stood quite still, with a fixed look in her great dark eyes, like a poor little wild animal brought to bay.

‘Who gave you leave to come into this room? Oh, you mischievous, naughty child!’ nurse was saying again; and then she gave her another shake.

It was no wonder, I think, that she was angry; anybody might well have been angry to see what Effie had been about; but yet she shook her in a rough way, and tender-hearted little Davie gave a plaintive exclamation as she did it.

‘Oh, nursie, don’t !—you’ll hurt her !’ he said, and put out one of his hands hurriedly, and touched Effie’s hand that was nearest to him. It was a poor little feeble effort to protect her—not worth much, you know : perhaps Effie didn’t notice it.

‘I’m not hurting her, my dear ; but it would be a good thing for her if somebody *would* hurt her,’ said nurse indignantly, ‘for such a child as she is I never came across. What in the world was it that you were doing to your cousin, Miss Effie ?’ and here nurse gave her a third shake. ‘But it’s no use for me to ask you ; if you speak at all you’ll tell me nothing but lies. You were at some mischief—that’s certain, and the best thing you can do now is to go away before you kill your poor dear cousin outright. Go away, and don’t you dare to come back again ! Oh, dear me, I never saw such a child in all my life !’ cried poor nurse, with an angry sigh, as she stooped to pick up the broken pieces of glass.

And then Effie turned round, and went sullenly out of the room without a word. You would hardly believe how sorry she was in her heart at what had happened, nor what a dull frightened pain she felt lest

she should really have done some harm to Davie. That sharp little sudden cry of his was ringing in her ears still, and making her more miserable than anybody would have guessed. Davie's condition, you see, was a sort of dim and awful mystery to her at present, and a cold, dreadful fear came over her as she thought that perhaps she might have pulled out one of his bones, or done some other equally strange and terrible thing to him at that moment when she tried to lift him up. Suppose that she had undone all the doctors had been doing, and that she should be found out and punished for it !

She crept away, feeling frightened and very wretched. For the next hour or more she thought every minute that her aunt would come and scold her ; and as she sat silent in the same room with Meg (for it was before Meg had gone away, you know, that all this had happened) her heart beat at every sound she heard which seemed like the sound of footsteps coming near, and when at last her aunt did really come into the room she did not dare to lift up her eyes, and felt quite sick with fear.

But all that Mrs. Leighton said to her was a few very quiet words. She had not come in to speak to her at all, but to give some directions to Meg, and when she had spoken to Meg, she just paused for a moment or two, and then went up to Effie, and said, not angrily at all, but quite quietly and kindly—

‘My dear, I want you to understand that you must not go into Davie’s room unless I send for you. I quite believe that you did not mean to do any harm just now by going to speak to him, and carrying him that looking-glass, but, you see, you ended by breaking the glass and frightening him. Now, you must not go to him again unless I give you leave. He is very, very ill, and you do not know, Effie, what harm you might do to him when you were least thinking of it.’

The blood all went out of Effie’s cheeks as her aunt made this speech. She had quite expected when she saw Mrs. Leighton coming towards her that she was going to be scolded for her naughtiness in trying to lift Davie up ; but her aunt, you see, did not say a word about her having tried to lift Davie up, and did not seem to know anything about it. And,

indeed, the fact was that she did *not* know anything about it. What had happened when her mother went back to Davie's room was simply this :—

She came in, and found nurse upon her knees, picking up the bits of broken glass from the carpet.

‘Have you had an accident, nurse ?’ she asked her. And then nurse broke out indignantly—

‘No, ma’am, *I’ve* not had an accident, but Miss Effie has been here, and this is *her* piece of work. Didn’t you hear Master David cry out, Ma’am ? I was on the stairs, and it gave me such a turn, for—dear me!—I heard something fall, and I thought he’d tumbled out of bed ; but, bless his heart, *he’s* safe enough, I think ; it was only Miss Effie who had come in when all our backs were turned, and had wanted to show him his face in the glass (I never heard tell of such a child !), and somehow—how did she do it, dearie ?—the glass must have slipped out of her hands—the naughty little thing ! I’m sure I wish she was well out of the house !’

‘Did you ask Effie to bring you the glass, my darling ?’ the mother said.

‘N—o,’ answered Davie hesitatingly. ‘I didn’t *ask* her, but she thought I should like it. She didn’t mean any harm, mother’—said Davie quickly—‘I’m sure she didn’t.’

‘No, my dear, I don’t suppose she did. But people *do* harm, Davie, a thousand times for once that they *mean* it,’ the mother said quietly; ‘and so I think for the present we must prevent Effie from coming in here any more unless I give her leave.’

And then nurse went away with the broken pieces of the looking-glass, and Mrs. Leighton sat down to her sewing by Davie’s side; and it was no wonder, when, an hour afterwards, she saw Effie, and spoke to her about what she had been doing, that she did not say a word about her foolishness and naughtiness in trying to lift Davie up, for you see she had never heard that Effie had ever attempted to do such a thing, and neither she nor nurse had dreamt for a moment that poor David’s cry had arisen from anything more than fright. They thought he had cried out merely because he was startled, and the little lad was far too generous-hearted and too anxious to screen Effie to undeceive them. He did

not, indeed, much like leaving his mother to believe what was not true ; but still, how could he tell upon Effie, when Effie had meant no harm ?

All this took place two or three days before Meg went away, and Effie had only once seen Davie again for a very few moments. On the afternoon when the doctors had given those glad news about him her aunt had brought both her and Meg to his bedside, and Meg had kissed him, and Effie would—or at least she almost thought she would—have liked to kiss him too, only she felt shy and didn't, not even though Davie put up his little face for a moment, as if he supposed she meant to do it. For Davie that afternoon had been holding a kind of royal levée, and had been kissed and petted and laughed and cried over so much, that when Effie came he supposed almost as a matter of course that she was going to kiss him too, and so put up his lips, expecting it. But Effie did not kiss him. She only looked at him for a moment, and then began sheepishly to play with the trimming of the bed-curtains, and to twist and plait up the fringe, without saying a word, as if she didn't care a

pin for Davie. She would have found her tongue probably if Mrs. Leighton had not been in the room, but Mrs. Leighton *was* there, and so the foolish child stood as if she was dumb, and even Meg was shy, and had very little to say, and altogether the meeting could not be called a lively or amusing one. And then after this Effie saw no more of Davie till Meg was fairly off to Devonshire.

But the evening of that day when Meg went became memorable as the beginning of quite a new state of things. Effie was sitting alone, a few hours after Meg's departure, on the hearth-rug before the play-room fire, in the twilight (for the days drew in early now, and Harry was not yet come from school), when her aunt came in and spoke to her.

'Are you here by yourself, Effie?' she said. And then she went up and stood beside the child, and said kindly—

'You will be dull without Meg, I am afraid, my dear. If I thought you would care to come and sit with me I would bring you into Davie's room. Should you like to bring your book and come with me, or would you rather stay here?'

Effie, you know, was a foolish little goose. She had been thinking to herself hardly three minutes ago that she should like to go and have a look at Davie ; she had been wondering what was going on in his room, and thinking that she wished she was there that she might see ; and yet now, when her aunt said—‘Should you like to bring your book and come with me ?’ the silly little thing, instead of frankly and honestly answering ‘Yes,’ at once, and rising up to go, for a moment or two fidgetted her shoulders up and down in her dress, and then half sulkily, half shyly, mumbled—‘I don’t know.’

‘Suppose you come and try then,’ her aunt said good-naturedly. ‘Will you ?’ And she held out her hand.

Upon this Effie got up from the hearth-rug, without making any further response, in a slow, rather ungracious way, and in another minute she was going hand in hand with her aunt towards Davie’s room.

‘Here is Effie come to sit for a little while with us,’ the mother said as she opened the door and went in. ‘Now that Meg is gone, you know, Davie, you

and I must look a little after Effie. Find a seat for yourself, my dear. We will have lights presently, and then you will be able to read. Look, Effie, here is a nice chair by the fire.'

And then—doing what she was told just like a little automaton, and without uttering so much as a word of greeting to David—Effie went to this chair that was pointed out to her, and sat down. Perhaps, as she placed herself in it, the mother might have thought to herself, 'What a curious, immoveable child she is !' but, if she did so, at any rate she said nothing. Possibly she was too much accustomed by this time to the shy, sulky manner that Effie always put on in her presence to give any particular thought to her just now at all.

It was an evening just at the beginning of November, one of those early winter evenings when it grows damp and foggy after sunset, and fires begin to feel and look so pleasant. There was a bright one burning here in Davie's room, and though it was still hardly night, yet the cheerful blaze put out the dreary autumnal twilight, and made everything look warm and yellow instead of cold and white. Davie's bed was turned so that he

could lie and look at it, and this looking at the fire was one of the things that the little lad was very fond of. He never could bear to have anything between him and the fire—especially in the evenings. I suppose it was a sort of picture-book to him—a fairy-book, out of which he made fragments of wonderful stories.

There was a reclining chair by the bedside, where Mrs. Leighton had spent more than half her days and nights since Davie had been ill, and where she used to sit always when she watched beside him, and when she talked or read to him. She took her seat here now, and began to tell him some funny little stories of how Munc, the cat, was getting on with Frisk's new puppies, and how jealous he was of the attention that everybody was paying them, till Davie laughed with pleasure.

'Oh, mother, I should so like to see them together ! I wish you would bring up all the puppies and Munc to-morrow. Will you ?' he said.

'Very well—they shall all come up. Effie shall bring Munc, and I'll bring the puppies,' the mother said. 'They are dear little things, and really beginning now to grow quite pretty. I don't wonder at poor Munc being

so jealous, for somebody or other is playing with them and petting them all day long.'

'I don't like to think of anything being petted more than Munc,' said David regretfully. 'I think I shall be fondest of Munc always—he's such a dear cat. He always used to walk about the garden with me. I should like to be walking round the garden again,' said Davie, with a very little sigh.

'Yes, my darling,' said the mother, and laid her soft hand upon his hair. 'Yes, we should all like that, Davie.'

And then there was a little pause, and presently the mother said again—

'It is a good thing to be in God's hands, my boy, and to know that the end lies with Him. He has been so good to us till now.'

'Yes,' said Davie, in a very low voice.

After that nobody spoke again for several minutes, till the little lad stretched out one of his arms, and said softly—

'Mother, sing something now—before candles come.'

'Very well,' said the mother, and began to sing.

She had a very sweet, pleasant voice. It was not a strong voice, and I do not know that she had ever learnt to sing at all, but she sang well enough to make it very sweet to listen to her. Her voice was not rich nor full, but it was so pure and clear and soft. Once or twice before now Effie had heard through the closed door that some one was singing in Davie's room, but through a closed door such a voice as Mrs. Leighton's could be heard only very faintly indeed.

With a curious feeling the child listened to it now—at first with her big eyes wide open, and fixed in surprise on her aunt's face, then presently with something sweeter than surprise, with a sense of pleasure such as she might have felt if a gleam of sunlight had stolen in upon her in the midst of a grey day, or if some soft, unexpected warmth had come to her when she was cold. It was so like a *breathing* of music through the room that it touched her just as a sweet breath might have done.

It was quite dark when Mrs. Leighton left off singing. She had sung a hymn or two, and two or three old plaintive ballads—such pretty ballads, Effie thought, caring more for them than for the hymns, though she

liked the hymns too, and thought they were a great deal nicer than when all the people together sang them in church. It was quite dark, and the blaze had died out, and they could not see one another's faces in the room.

'We must be getting lights, and having tea,' the mother said, rising up at last. 'I wonder if your father has come in yet! Effie, my dear, you might go and see. Or, no,' said Mrs. Leighton, correcting herself, 'I want something downstairs; I will go myself. Will you stay here, Effie, or come with me?'

'I'll stay here,' said Effie, shortly.

And then Mrs. Leighton went, and as soon as she was gone Effie got cautiously up, and advanced on tiptoe to the bed.

'I say, I never knew she sang,' said Effie, opening the conversation with some abruptness.

'Didn't you?' responded Davie, not quite knowing what other answer this statement required.

'No; I used to think it was nurse. I mean when I heard her outside the door,' said Effie.

'Oh!' replied David, not very clear about the period to which Effie referred.

'I always supposed it was nurse. *She* sings too, you know,' said Effie.

'Yes; but she doesn't sing like mamma,' answered Davie firmly. 'I think mamma sings *beautifully*.'

'I daresay other people could sing like her if they tried,' said Effie, not disposed to assent all at once to this extravagant praise.

'I think if they could they would do it,' replied Davie bluntly.

And then Effie changed the conversation.

'I think I'm going to be a good deal here,' said Effie suddenly.

'Oh, are you?' answered Davie; but he scarcely seemed to show as much delight at the announcement as perhaps he ought to have done.

'Yes; I think so,' said Effie. 'And I'll tell you what I'll do if I come—I'll tell stories to you.' And Effie, conscious of how important an announcement this was, began with great emphasis to nod her head.

'Oh, Effie, will you?' cried Davie, and the little face did really brighten now; for in former days, you know, Effie had never condescended to tell stories to Davie,

but had treated him quite in a rough and cavalier way when he even so much as crept near to listen at the times when she was pouring them out to Meg.

‘Yes; I’ll tell you lots,’ said Effie. ‘I’ve got ever so many ones in my head. And I’ll make pictures for you, —there!’

‘Oh, Effie!’ cried Davie again, more and more delighted.

‘I’d rather make pictures for you than for Meg, even if Meg was here—and she isn’t, you know,’ said Effie. ‘Meg’s stupid sometimes; I don’t think she understands.’

(Now this was an ungenerous speech of Effie’s, seeing that Meg, whether she understood or not, was at least always unchangeable in her admiration; but then Meg, as she justly observed, was away, and Effie, I am afraid, was not much in the habit of minding what she said about people behind their backs).

‘I don’t think Meg’s stupid,’ said Davie, manfully.

‘You don’t know anything about it,’ answered Effie, with contempt. ‘*I* know, though.’ And this was said with such an air of being able to prove the matter

beyond all doubt that Davie, quite abashed, held his tongue.

‘I’ll come and sit with you ever so long, if you like,’ said Effie, after a little pause. ‘I’ve been trying already to come.’

‘Have you?’ enquired Davie, naturally flattered by this information.

‘Yes ; I wanted to see what went on. And—I say, I think it’s nice.’

‘Nice to be ill?’ enquired Davie, doubtfully.

‘Well, I mean, just to be *here*,’ said Effie. ‘I think it’s fun.’

‘I don’t know. I would rather be well again if I could,’ said Davie.

‘Oh yes, *you* would, I dare say ; but I wasn’t thinking of you,’ exclaimed Effie, with delightful frankness.

‘Oh !’ replied Davie, humbly.

(Davie, you see, was rather afraid of his cousin, and, when any of her remarks appeared to him to be curious or a little questionable, he generally took refuge in ejaculating ‘Oh !’ It was weak, I daresay ; but then in the matter of cleverness he was no match at all, you see, for Effie.)

‘Oh!’ said Davie, humbly; and then Effie went on in the same pleasant strain.

‘I don’t think I should like to be you, a bit; of course *that* can’t be nice,’ said Effie; ‘but I mean what I like is coming here and talking to you. I say,’ said Effie abruptly, ‘you’re all right now—aren’t you?’

‘All right?’ enquired Davie hesitatingly.

‘Yes—your bones, I mean,’ said Effie. ‘*They’re* all right by this time, aren’t they?’

‘I don’t know. I suppose they’re coming right,’ answered David rather bashfully.

‘What a time they are about it!’ said Effie.

And then, just at that moment, a coal fell in the fire, and a sudden little blaze broke out which made a light in the room, and Effie came a step closer to Davie’s pillow, and began to stare at him with her big eyes.

‘Your face never was in a smash at all, was it?’ enquired Effie, after a few moments of this undisguised investigation.

‘No!’ answered Davie quickly. ‘It was just like this—always.’

‘Well, that’s a good thing— isn’t it?’ said Effie cheerfully; ‘for if it had been smashed you would have been so horrid, you know, that nobody would ever have looked at you. At least I know *I* wouldn’t.’

It did not seem quite necessary to express any sense of gratitude at this announcement, so Davie held his tongue, and Effie went on meditatively looking at him.

‘And you wouldn’t have been a bit like things in marble,’ said Effie.

‘Like *what*?’ enquired Davie rather quickly, for this seemed a most mysterious remark.

‘Things in marble that they put on monuments. You’ve got none of them here,’ said Effie scornfully, ‘but they have them in other places. *I’ve* seen them.’

‘And what are they?’ enquired Davie in a tone of awe.

‘Boys,’ said Effie shortly.

‘Oh!’ said Davie, with the awe quite gone again.

‘They make them in marble, leaning on urns sometimes; and sometimes they’re sitting down doing nothing—and they’ve got wings and no clothes,’ said Effie.

‘But I don’t know why you say they’re like *me*,’ said Davie, naturally a little hurt at this description.

‘There’s one of them like you,’ persisted Effie. ‘I saw him in a church long ago. He had wings, and he was lying on a pillow, and his eyes were shut, and I don’t know whether he was dead or not,—but—but—’ said Effie, with the colour all at once coming to her face,—‘I’ve thought of it ever so many times, and it is like you when you’re looking white—and you’re looking white now—and I wish you wouldn’t, for it makes me think you’re going to die!’ cried Effie, with her lips suddenly quivering.

This outbreak of emotion on Effie’s part was so unexpected and unintelligible to Davie that he was quite taken aback by it, and could only lie looking at her in mingled alarm and distress; and it is doubtful what would have been said or done next if it had not been that suddenly in the silence that followed Effie’s speech there came a sound of footsteps on the stairs, and then in a moment Davie’s face brightened. ‘That’s mamma!’ cried Davie, and it was quite plain that he was not sorry to have his *tête à tête* with Effie ended. As

for her, she slipped back to her seat by the fire like a hare, and Mrs. Leighton when she came back could not have told that during her absence her niece had ever so much as opened her lips.

‘Did Effie talk to you when I was away?’ she asked Davie later in the evening.

And then Davie answered—‘Oh yes, she talked.’ And, after a moment—‘She says she will come and tell me stories, mother.’


‘And shall you like that?’ Mrs. Leighton asked.

‘Oh yes!’ said Davie heartily. ‘She tells such fine stories, you know—just like a book.’

‘I am glad that she will tell them to you then, my dear,’ the mother said with a smile.

And that night I think her aunt felt more kindly to Effie than she often did, and kissed her at bedtime, when she bade her good-night, with a warmer kiss than usual.

CHAPTER VIII.

 N the next day Effie did tell David a story out of her head. She was not asked to go into his room during the morning, but in the course of the afternoon her aunt said to her—

‘Should you like to come and sit with Davie while I write my letters, Effie? I shall be glad if you will come for a little while, for then I can take my writing into the dressing-room, and he won’t feel dull if he has you to talk to.’

Upon this Effie got up a little more promptly than she had done the day before, and was soon perched on a chair by Davie’s fireside, while Mrs. Leighton placed herself in the dressing-room so that by turning her head she could see, though she could not hear, most of what went on.

Effie sat without opening her lips until Mrs. Leighton was safely settled in the adjoining room ; then, fixing her eyes on Davie, she opened the conversation.

‘Well?’ said Effie.

As he had no other remark prepared, and probably thought this a good one, Davie said ‘Well?’ too ; and then there was a little silence, and Effie nodded her head.

‘I said I would come, you know,’ was Effie’s next remark.

‘Yes, I know you did,’ replied Davie.

‘And I’ve got a story all ready,’ said Effie.

‘Oh, have you? I’m *so* glad!’ cried Davie.

‘It’s quite a new one too ; I never told it to anybody. But I think I’ll get upon the bed before I begin, because that will bring me nearer to you,’ said Effie.

‘Oh very well,’ answered Davie.

And so Effie got upon the bed.

‘Now, that’s more comfortable,’ she said, ‘isn’t it? I always like to sit so—cross-legged—when I tell stories, because they do it in the east.’

The reason seemed an odd and insufficient one to Davie, but he said 'Oh !' again, supposing that there was some deep meaning in it—as, indeed, there no doubt was, for it was quite true that Effie knew a good deal more about the habits of story-tellers than he did.

'Now then,' said Effie, being seated to her mind, 'I'll begin.' And accordingly she gave a little cough to clear her throat, and then—

'Once upon a time there was an ogre,' she said—

'Is it about an ogre? Oh—is that nice?' interrupted Davie, timidly venturing to hint an objection.

'Nice? Yes—why shouldn't it be nice?' demanded Effie quickly. 'You *must* have an ogre, or a bad fairy, or a dragon, or—something, you know.'

'Oh well—yes, I suppose you must,' said Davie weakly.

And then Effie began again.

'Once upon a time there was an ogre, who lived in a great castle that was built in a wood.'

'Did he live alone?' enquired David.

Effie paused for a moment to consider, and then she rebuked David.

‘You shouldn’t ask that yet ; you’ll find out in time,’ she said. ‘He lived in a great castle that was built in a wood. The wood was very thick and dark, and there were no pathways through it, and it had never yet been trodden,’ said Effie, rising with her subject, ‘by the foot of man.’

‘Who built the castle then?’ asked Davie abruptly, naturally surprised.

‘It was built by fairies,’ said Effie, after a moment’s consideration. ‘It had a hundred rooms in it, and every room was as big as—a—field.’

‘That couldn’t have been very comfortable,’ remarked Davie under his breath.

‘Who *said* it was comfortable?’ exclaimed Effie instantly. ‘Ogres don’t care about comfort.’

‘Oh!—I didn’t know,’ said Davie apologetically.

‘They only care about eating. They spend all their time looking out for travellers going by, and laying wait for them, and gobbling them up,’ said Effie.

‘But how could this one do that when *nobody* passed by?’ enquired Davie, betraying an inconveniently good memory.

‘*Who* said that nobody passed by?’ demanded Effie indignantly. (Effie naturally felt that Davie was going a little too far, and must be pulled up.) ‘If you’re to go on making objections every moment in this way I’ll stop at once,’ said Effie severely.

‘O no, Effie—please go on, and I won’t say another word!’ cried Davie anxiously. ‘I only wanted to understand, you know.’

‘Well, I wish you *wouldn’t* want to understand,’ said Effie.

And, though this was clearly a most unreasonable wish in the circumstances, yet Davie was so eager to have his cousin go on with her story that he refrained from saying a single word more, and after a few moments’ silence Effie cleared her brow and proceeded.

‘There were a hundred rooms in the castle, and though they were all so big,’ said Effie, ‘yet every one of them was full of human bones.’

(‘Where in the world did they all come from?’ thought Davie to himself, quite amazed; but after the rebuke that had just been given him he did not venture to enquire.)

‘There was one room full of the bones of men, and another of the bones of women, and another of the bones of children,’ said Effie ; ‘and one of elephants’ bones—’

(‘Elephants are not human beings,’ thought Davie ; but still he did not like to say so.)

‘—and one of lions, and one of tigers,” Effie went on ; ‘and one of every different beast you can think of.’

‘What was the use of being so particular about their bones ?’ asked Davie, unable to restrain himself any longer. ‘Why couldn’t he mix them all together ?’

‘He didn’t choose to,’ said Effie coldly.

‘Well, it must have given him a great deal of trouble,’ suggested Davie meekly.

‘He didn’t mind trouble. He had nothing else to do,’ replied Effie. ‘Whenever he was tired and wanted something to amuse himself with he used to go into one of the rooms, and pull down the bones and build them up again.’

‘Dear me !’ said Davie.

‘He had no one to speak to,’ Effie went on, after she had disposed of this part of the subject, ‘because

he had eaten his wife and fourteen sons of his long ago.'

'Had he more sons than fourteen?' enquired Davie.

'No,' said Effie after a moment's deliberation, 'he had just fourteen, and he ate them all.'

'And had he any daughters?' asked Davie, whose thirst for knowledge was very great.

Effie paused for a little, not quite certain whether or not to consider this question impertinent; but after weighing the matter, she seemed to consider that she might without loss of dignity reply to it.

'No,' said Effie, 'he had no daughters. But in a tower at one end of the castle he had a—prisoner.'

'Oh!' said Davie, with his eyes brightening. Effie seemed to be coming to something interesting at last.

'She was a beautiful young lady,' said Effie, 'and the ogre had stolen her, and kept her shut up for ever so many years.'

('She could hardly have been so very young then,' thought Davie: but as this would hardly have been a polite remark, he held his tongue and did not make it.)

'He had built a high tower on purpose to put her in,' said

Effie, 'and had shut her into it with a great iron door, and twice a day he came to see her, and brought her food.'

'What kind of food?' said Davie quickly.

'Corn,' answered Effie bluntly.

'Oh!' said Davie in a tone that implied great relief.

'Only—what did she do with it?' asked Davie after a moment's thought. 'Did she eat it like a horse?'

'No, she made it into bread,' said Effie. 'She could cook whatever she liked.'

At this reply various other difficulties suggested themselves to Davie's mind—such as, where she got coals from to make a fire, and how she managed to grind the corn, and whether it was necessary for her to bake so often as twice a day; but he wisely perceived that it was best to hold his tongue upon these points, so he kept silent, and Effie went on.

'The ogre was pretty kind to her, except now and then when he got into a passion and threatened to eat her up; but he never did eat her up, because it was more useful to him to keep her alive.'

'Why was that more useful to him?' asked Davie



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in his impetuous way, but Effie merely gave him a look, and went on as if she had not heard the question.

‘He would have been very badly off sometimes for anything to eat if it had not been for the lady,’ said Effie, ‘for many of the travellers through the wood—’

(‘I thought there were *no* travellers through the wood,’ said Davie to himself; but this point of the story was treated by Effie in such a bewildering manner, and seemed altogether so wrapped up in mystery, that Davie did not venture to mention his perplexity about it aloud a second time.)

‘—for many of the travellers through the wood,’ said Effie, ‘would never have come near the castle at all if it had not been for her. But it happened that there was an open place at the top of the tower, and the lady used to stand here looking out nearly all day long; and whenever she saw anybody anywhere in the wood she used to wave her handkerchief in the air till they caught sight of it, and came near; and then she would call to them—“Oh, kind people, come and deliver me, and kill the wicked ogre;” and would send them round to the castle gate—and then, of course, the ogre would rush out upon

them with a great club in his hand, and knock them down and eat them up.'

'Oh, how horrid !' said Davie, with just indignation.

'But at last one day,' said Effie, 'there came a splendid carriage driving through the wood.'

'I thought there were no roads? Oh!—it doesn't matter, though,' said Davie hurriedly. And Effie went on.

'A splendid carriage came driving through the wood. It had eight horses, and a postilion upon every horse, dressed in scarlet ; and the carriage was all of gold, and there were white feathers—plumes of feathers—stuck about it,' said Effie a little vaguely ; 'and inside it there was a beautiful prince. It came driving through the wood like lightning, and as soon as ever the young lady saw it—(the young lady's name was Rosabella,' said Effie, in an abrupt parenthesis)—

'That's a very pretty name,' remarked David.

'As soon as ever Rosabella saw it she began to wave her white handkerchief in the air with all her might, and to cry out, "Oh, noble prince, stop and save me ! Oh, come and kill the dreadful ogre, and rescue a poor

captive maiden !” in such a heartrending way,’ said Effie, ‘that the prince immediately ordered all the postilions to stop till he found out what was the matter.

“Where is the ogre who has taken you captive, beautiful lady ?” said the prince when the carriage had stopped ; and then he looked up to the tower where Rosabella was standing, and as soon as he saw her he fell in love with her on the spot.

“He’s down in the castle,” answered Rosabella. “You’ll find him at the castle gate with a club in his hand, and if you are afraid of him he’ll kill you dead as soon as you open your mouth with a single blow. He has already killed six thousand young princes who have tried to deliver me—”

“Oh dear, that’s a great many !” cried Davie, with a little gasp ; but Effie took no notice of the interruption.

“—and he will kill you too unless you do exactly what I tell you. You must go straight up to him, and take him by his beard, and cut it off.”

‘But he couldn’t do that in a moment,’ said Davie eagerly.

‘Yes, he could,’ answered Effie, ‘if he had a pair of scissors ; and Rosabella gave him one. She threw a

large pair down to him as she spoke, and he caught them gracefully on the points of his—of his fingers,' said Effie, rather impatiently, feeling that this was a little prosaic, but yet unable at the moment to think of anything else about him that was likely to have points.

'“Take these,” said Rosabella' (Effie went on); ‘“they are enchanted scissors, and the moment you touch his beard with them he will fall down at your feet, and will be the same as if he was dead. Then take a knife that you will find at his side, and chop off his head, and as soon as you have done that take the bunch of keys that is hanging at his girdle, and come, noble prince, and deliver me !”’

‘But if she had had these scissors all this time, why had she never cut off the ogre's beard with them herself?’ asked Davie, very much surprised.

This was such a natural enquiry that Effie could scarcely refuse to answer it, so she coughed for a moment to give herself time to think what she should say, and then—

‘His beard could only be cut off by a man,’ she replied. ‘When any woman used the scissors they were just like any other scissors.’

‘Then why hadn’t she given them to some of the other princes?’ asked Davie, unsatisfied still, and reflecting with distress upon the untimely death of those six thousand.

‘She *had* given them to the other princes,’ answered Effie, with an air of dignity, ‘but they had all been afraid to use them; and then, when they were dead, Rosabella had only to lean over the tower, and whisper, “Scissors, scissors, come back to me!” and back they came flying through the air.’

‘Oh!’ said Davie, feeling that this was on the whole a frank and explicit statement. ‘Well,—you had got to “Come and deliver me!”’

‘Yes,’ said Effie. ‘And then, as Rosabella said that, she looked so beautiful that the prince felt he was ready to die for her. So he got out of the carriage, and told the postilions to wait until he came back again, and then he walked round to the front of the castle, and to be sure as soon as he got there he saw the wicked ogre standing at the door with his great club in his hand; and the moment the ogre caught sight of him he set up the most dreadful laugh you ever heard, and began to gnash his

teeth together. "Have you come to pay me a visit, my pretty prince?" cried the ogre. "Come along quickly, I'm delighted to see you." And then he lifted up his club in the air, and in another moment he would have struck the prince dead ; but the prince just laughed a little, and stepped straight up to him, and took him by the beard, and cut it off ; and then the ogre fell down at his feet, and the prince cut off his head.'

(The remarkable rapidity with which the prince performed this important act took Davie rather by surprise ; but as, upon the whole, he was not much interested in the ogre's fate, he let it pass without remark, and Effie went on.)

'As soon as he was dead,' said Effie, 'the prince took the bunch of keys from his side, as Rosabella had told him to do, and went into the castle. "I must find my way at once to the lovely lady," said the prince, "and set her free." So he walked boldly on, and soon he came to a closed door. "I must open this with one of my keys," said the prince, and began to try his keys in the lock, one after another. But he tried ninety-nine keys before he came to the right one. "I never knew

such a provoking bunch of keys in all my life," said the prince. "If I have many doors to open, and they all take me as long as this one, it will be to-morrow morning at least before I shall be able to set the lovely lady free. However, here is this one unlocked at last, so I must get on now as quickly as I can." And then as he said that the prince opened the door, and passed with a shudder through the room, for it was one of the rooms that was all filled with dead men's bones, and went straight to another door at the other side of it. "I hope I may be more lucky here," said the prince, and began to try the keys again ; but he was not a bit more lucky, for he was not able to get this door open for three hours and a half.'

'Oh, dear me !' said Davie pityingly, feeling that the prince's want of dexterity in the management of keys must have been something quite unusual.

'And then,' said Effie, 'when he got into the second room he was in a greater difficulty than ever. For in this room there were two doors, and which of them to try and open the prince did not know. So, as he was getting quite tired out by this time, he sat down on a

heap of bones in the middle of the room, and tried to think what he should do.'

'I would have gone back and tried something else—a ladder or something,' said Davie, with energy, convinced that *anything* would have been better than to go on with this tedious work of the keys, for which it was so evident the prince had no kind of natural gift.

'That's just what the prince *did* think,' replied Effie, seizing this suggestion of Davie's, of which she had not before thought, and rapidly appropriating it. 'After he had sat still for a little while he made up his mind that he would go back and tell the beautiful lady the trouble he was in, and see if she could not do something to help him ; and so he got up, and had just began to walk back to the door by which he had come in, when all at once a great blast of wind came and slammed it shut in his face. And then,' said Effie, 'though the prince spent the whole night long in trying, he never could find the right key to open it with any more.'

This seemed a fit point at which to stop for a moment and take breath, so Effie paused and changed her position, and Davie stirred and resettled himself too.

'Then, as some remark or question seemed to be expected by Effie in order to set her off again, Davie did what the etiquette of the occasion appeared to require.

'He was in a bad way now,' said Davie.

'Yes, wasn't he?' replied Effie, cheerfully. 'He was in such a passion when morning came that he was almost out of his mind. He went about gnashing his teeth, and tearing his hair, and knocking his head against the walls. He was so worn out with rage and hunger and want of sleep that if you had seen him,' said Effie, becoming a little confused in her description, 'you would almost have thought he was a wild beast. If it had not been that at last, just as he was beginning to feel that he could not bear it any longer, he really did find the key that opened one of the other doors, I think he would have fallen down dead.

'However, it was not much comfort to him even when he had found it, and got the door open, for it was not the door by which he had come in, but one of the others, which took him into a third room in which there were *three* doors; and when the poor prince saw this he was

in such a state of despair that he fell down flat upon the ground. "I shall never get out of this horrible castle as long as I live!" exclaimed the prince; and then he began to cry as if his heart would break.'

'I don't think he should have done that,' said Davie hurriedly, in a tone of strong disapprobation.

'He couldn't help it,' said Effie (conscious, perhaps, that the tears were a mistake, but yet boldly resolving to stick to them), 'he was so tired and miserable. And, besides, he only cried for a very little while. After a few minutes he wiped his eyes, and took up the bunch of keys, and went to work again; but, though he tried the keys, over and over, night and day, he never got the next door open for a week.'

The story seemed to be getting so painful at this point that Davie didn't like it, and began to feel seriously uneasy.

'What did he do for food all the time?' asked Davie, perceiving all sorts of practical difficulties in the prince's position.

'He had to do without food,' answered Effie, coolly.

'But he *couldn't* do without food,' exclaimed Davie earnestly.

‘Well, he *had* to,’ returned Effie impatiently. ‘At least,’ said Effie, with less decision, ‘he had to—for the most part. Every now and then he found a little.’

‘*Where* did he find it?’ asked Davie suspiciously, not liking the vagueness of this statement.

‘It’s of no consequence where he found it,’ replied Effie shortly.

‘The ogre hadn’t any food except dead people and beasts,’ persisted Davie, showing an unaccountable obstinacy over this point.

‘Yes, he had ; he had corn,’ retorted Effie triumphantly.

‘Oh, to be sure!’ said Davie, feeling that this certainly explained the matter in a satisfactory way, but yet longing to put further enquiries of various sorts—to ask, for instance, how Rosabella, who had been accustomed hitherto to two meals a day from this said corn, was getting on now without any whatever ; by what curious system of housekeeping it was that the ogre had his corn scattered in little bits all about the different rooms, instead of having it kept in sacks in one place ; whether there was no possibility, since the castle doors were so very hard to

open, of getting out at the windows ; what all the eight postilions were about, and how it happened that when their master did not return to them, they failed to bestir themselves and bring assistance, and get the doors of the castle beaten in ; or, if they were too stupid to think of this, how Rosabella, who seemed a very clever and ready young woman, did not put them up to it. All these different questions Davie longed to ask, but as Effie had shown herself a little snappish in explaining difficulties, he thought upon the whole that it would be most graceful not to submit them to her. Accordingly, after he had said, 'Oh ! to be sure !' he held his tongue, and Effie went on with her story.

'I can't tell you everything that the prince did,' said Effie, 'or else I should never get to the end ; but the longer he stayed in the castle the more bewildered he got, and the further he went in the more doors he found, so that at last the walls of the room were all filled with doors, and he never knew which one to try to open, and he soon lost his way altogether, and didn't know whether he was going backwards or forwards, and he spent all his days and nearly all his nights in wandering up and

down; and so he went on and on and on, and round and round and round, for a hundred years.'

'Oh dear, that *is* a long time!' cried Davie, who was always rather taken aback by Effie's climaxes—which, indeed, *were* usually of a startling character. Effie, however, took no notice of his exclamation, but went straight on.

'At last one day,' said Effie, in an impressive tone which showed that something important was about to come, 'at last one day, the prince opened a door that, instead of leading as usual into another room, led into a dark, dark, long, long passage. It was so long that he could see nothing before him but one little spot of light far away at the end of it, like a star, and so dark that he had to feel with his hands to find out where the walls at the sides of it were. "Well, this *is* something new at last," said the prince, and you may fancy how glad he was after having seen nothing but rooms full of bones for a hundred years. Of course he went into the passage at once, and walked on and on, as well as he could in the darkness, for ever so long, till at last the star of light at the end began to get bigger, and then bigger and bigger,

and after an hour or so, he saw that it came from a great grated door; and then, when he came close up to this door—which he did very fast at last, for he was so impatient that he ran with all his might—then, at last what do you think he saw? He saw a little stone passage, and at the end of the passage the winding stair that went up to the tower!

‘Well, you may be sure he lost no time in trying to get *this* door open. He went down on his knees before it, and tried the keys over and over as fast as lightning; then he tried them more slowly; then he took them and tried each of them for half-an-hour together; but still it was all no use, for not one of the keys would open the door. Then the poor prince got into such a state that he hardly knew what he was about. He took hold of the door and shook it, and kicked it with all his might, and called out at the top of his voice—“Rosabella! Rosabella!”

‘How did he know her name was Rosabella?’ asked Davie promptly.

‘I forgot, he didn’t call “Rosabella;” he called “Beautiful lady,”’ said Effie correcting herself, ‘over

and over again ; but nobody answered, and not a sound was to be heard. At last, when he could think of nothing more to do, he sat down on the ground, and wished that he was dead.

‘He was so miserable,’ said Effie, ‘that he sat on the ground and never moved for a whole week ; and I dare say he would have gone on sitting there for ever if it had not been that at last one day, as he was turning his eyes sorrowfully round, what should he suddenly see, hanging up upon a nail in the wall beside him, but a great, big, rusty key.’

‘It was very odd that he didn’t see it before,’ said Davie.

‘No, it wasn’t odd,’ retorted Effie. ‘It was hanging nearly over his head, and, besides, there was very little light. The instant he caught sight of it he started to his feet, and you may be sure he was not long in taking it down, and trying it ; and what was his delight,’ cried Effie, ‘after two or three minutes to find it slowly, slowly turning in the lock ! In a minute more the door was open, and the prince sprang up the stairs.’

‘And now all his difficulties seemed over, for, though

he came to a new door at every dozen steps or so, yet each one at his approach flew open.'

'What was the meaning of that?' said Davie.

'I wish you wouldn't want a meaning for everything,' exclaimed Effie, quite impatiently; for to tell the truth, she had not given up this lock and key business for any reason whatever except that she was tired of it. 'Why shouldn't they fly open if they liked?'

'Oh, *I* don't know,' said Davie, rather abashed, and feeling that he had really no objection to their taking that course, or any other; and then Effie went on.

'Every door as he came up to it flew open, and he had nothing to do but to hurry on as fast as he could go. The higher up he went, too, the more beautiful did everything about him become. The stairs became carpeted with velvet carpets, the walls were hung with pictures; the ceilings were painted with crimson and gold, and a soft light shone over everything from hundreds of coloured lamps. Delicious scents filled the air too, and beautiful flowers were—were to be seen everywhere,' said Effie a little vaguely, not being able at the moment to think where the flowers could stand.

‘The prince’s heart beat faster and faster the nearer he got to the top of the stairs. “In another minute I shall behold her,” he cried to himself. “I shall kneel at her feet, and ask her to accept my love.”’

‘Oh—wasn’t he rather old for that?’ interrupted Davie a good deal startled.

The prince had been so long about the business, you see, that Davie had quite given up all thought of any thing like love-making long ago; it seemed rather out of place between old people, over a hundred. Besides Davie could not rid himself of an uneasy recollection that the prince could never have had any opportunity since he entered the castle of changing his clothes, or even—as far as had appeared—of so much as washing his face during the bygone century, so that, however handsome he might have been to begin with, he could scarcely any longer be an attractive object to look upon. His abrupt enquiry, therefore, though ill-timed, was perhaps excusable, and Effie stopped, and felt, on consideration, that some explanation was necessary.

‘In enchanted places,’ said Effie after a moment, ‘people never grow old. Though he had been in the

castle for a hundred years the prince looked just as he did the first day he came into it. He wasn't a bit older than he was then, and he wasn't a bit less handsome.'

'And hadn't his clothes worn out?' enquired Davie.

'No,' said Effie, 'his clothes were just the same too. If you had seen them you wouldn't have thought that a day had passed.'

'Oh, that's all right then,' said Davie, quite satisfied with this arbitrary statement, and Effie proceeded.

'He got to the top of the stairs at last, and entered a gorgeous vestibule.'

'What's that?' said Davie hastily.

'What's what?' enquired Effie.

'A—vestibule,' said Davie meekly.

'It's a—a place,' said Effie.

'O yes—I suppose so,' answered Davie, not feeling much enlightened.

'A place before you come to another place. I'm sure you know all about it,' said Effie quickly, and went on. 'He came to a gorgeous vestibule, at the end of which was a golden door all sparkling with jewels, so that it shone like the sun; and as soon as

ever the prince saw this his knees began to tremble under him—'

'What made them do that?' interrupted Davie, not in the least seeing any reason for it : but Effie, without so much as stopping, merely silenced him with a look.

'—so that he could scarcely stand, and his heart beat so that it seemed almost going to burst, for he felt sure that as soon as he opened that door he should see Rosabella.

'It was two or three minutes before he could compose himself enough to go forward, but he did it at last, and was just about to touch the door when it slowly swung wide open before him ; and at the same moment the loveliest music began to play, and invisible voices in the air called him by his name, and a great blaze of light came all round him, as if a hundred suns were shining ; and as soon as he could see—for he was so dazzled at first that he couldn't see anything—the prince found that he was in a splendid room all hung round with sky blue curtains sprinkled with golden stars, and in the middle of the floor, on a golden couch, and wrapped in long white robes, and covered with a veil—'

But Effie had just got to this interesting point when there was a movement in the dressing-room, and Mrs. Leighton came out with her letters in her hand.

‘Oh mother dear, go away again for a minute,’ cried Davie. ‘She’s just going to finish.’

‘I’m *not* going to finish!’ exclaimed Effie, resenting this interpretation of her intentions with some warmth. She had stopped abruptly the moment her aunt appeared.

‘Oh, I thought you were,’ said Davie humbly.

‘I’ve not much more than begun,’ said Effie scornfully. ‘I shouldn’t think much of it if this was all!’

And she looked so contemptuous that Davie—rather ashamed of having felt the least interested in what turned out now to be nothing more than an introduction—hastened to say that indeed *he* had not thought much of it either—at least not *very* much—that was to say, of course he had liked it very much, but he thought there had been rather too much of the castle and the keys, and rather too little of everything else; but he had enjoyed it exceedingly all the same, and if the best part was

really still to come, it would be delightful indeed. And then, having made rather a confused and contradictory speech, Davie at this point came to a stop.

‘Well, at any rate, there has been enough story-telling, I think, for to-day,’ the mother said, ‘so suppose Effie puts off the rest of her tale till to-morrow, and goes now and takes a run in the garden while the sun is bright.’

Upon which Effie did this; and there was no more of Rosabella’s story told for the remainder of that day.

Nor indeed, children, am I going to recount to you the rest of that young lady’s doings and adventures at all, for they were so vast in extent and so prodigious in number, as Effie narrated them during the next four or five days, that I am sure I should get quite tired if I were to try to write them all down, and I am pretty sure you would all get tired of reading them. The difficulties and dangers and sorrows that Rosabella encountered in her course through the world were something almost inconceivable: how many times she was parted from the prince, and

how many times he found her again I really hesitate to say, while as for the enormous labours that she went through, and the courage that she displayed in the most trying situations, they were beyond all praise—and almost all belief. She must, it is true, have been a little troublesome as a companion, seeing that she fainted on an average four times a day, and always at the most critical and inconvenient moments; but as this seemed to be the only fault she had, it would perhaps be ungracious to dwell upon it.

She appears to have lived to a prodigious age, and to have grown steadily more and more beautiful the older she became. As correctly as I can calculate, she had about reached her two-hundred-and-fiftieth birthday when she was at last happily united to the faithful prince, who thereupon—all troubles abruptly terminating at this point—retired with her to his kingdom, where his subjects (who must have been of a delightfully calm and hopeful nature) had been patiently waiting his return for more than two centuries, and, instantly recognising him, instituted such extraordinary rejoicings that they went on for ever after.

This was the end of the story, as Effie reached it on the fifth day of her narration, and Davie gave a sigh when all was over, and said it had been 'beautiful.' Indeed, the account of Rosabella's sorrows had been so pathetic that Davie had been quite carried away by it. I don't think the tale had seemed too long to *him*.

'Oh, I'll tell you a better one than this next time,' said Effie.

'I don't think any other could be better than this has been,' answered Davie simply.

But he was only too ready, nevertheless, to be told another, whether it should be better or not.

CHAPTER IX.

IN a very little while it came to be a daily habit with Effie to present herself at the door of Davie's room as soon as ever he was ready for visitors, and peep in, in hopes of either finding him alone, in which case she would introduce her small person with very little ceremony, or of being seen and invited to enter by Mrs. Leighton. She used to come with playthings, and books, and pictures, and perch herself, as soon as she was admitted, by Davie's side. There was something in the light which often came into Davie's face when she appeared that touched the heart of the odd little child more, perhaps, than anybody guessed.

As these days passed on, indeed, Effie's mind became more and more full of Davie. The way in

which he bore all the pain he had to suffer awoke a constant wonder in her, and often such a feeling of pity, that at moments it was almost a kind of passion. She had all her life felt a strange sort of awe of things she could not understand, and a strange sort of attraction towards them, and there was something in the change that had come over Davie which excited these feelings in her very greatly. Something had become different in him, he had ceased to be the old Davie; and yet she could not tell how it was. In many ways he was just the same as he had been of old; when she told stories to him, or played with him, she almost forgot that there was any change; but again and again, when she was not thinking of it, something that he said or did would suddenly bring back the strange sense of difference—of something having happened that had made the old Davie pass away, and this one come in his place. And then she would try till she was tired to understand it; she would try, with such a curious mixture of timidity and inquisitiveness, to pierce into the mystery and find it out.

Perched, facing him, upon his bed, she would attempt sometimes to enlighten herself about it by putting very queer questions to him in a doubtful and speculative way.

‘Would you be a ghost if you could help it?’ she asked him one day.

‘No!’ answered Davie rather indignantly. ‘But I’m not a ghost now.’ For Effie had put her enquiry in a somewhat offensive tone, as if she supposed Davie had tried his hand at the sort of thing already, and could speak from experience as to whether or not he liked it.

‘Well, but you might have been,’ retorted Effie.

This reply struck Davie as being in a certain sense just, yet still as taking only a limited view of the question, so he hastened to correct it.

‘And so might you,’ said Davie.

‘/?’ exclaimed Effie, with an expression of deep disgust. ‘What do you mean by that?’ And the idea seemed to be regarded by her as so insulting a one that Davie felt uneasy; but still, feeling convinced that his position was a good one, he was not inclined at once to give it up.

‘Why mightn’t you just as well as anybody else?’ said Davie. ‘Anyone might be a ghost.’

‘But *I’m* not ill,’ said Effie. ‘*You* were much nearer a ghost, I am sure, a week or two ago than ever I was.’

‘Oh -yes, if you mean that,’ said Davie meekly.

‘Of course I mean that,’ answered Effie. ‘I know it was very horrid to think of your turning into a ghost. It used to keep me awake all night.’

‘Oh!’ said Davie, a little uncertain whether or not to consider this remark in the light of a compliment. ‘But mamma says there are no ghosts,’ he added after a moment.

‘Oh, stuff!’ said Effie, with unspeakable contempt.

‘I’m sure you have never seen one,’ urged Davie.

‘I’ve as good as seen them,’ said Effie.

And there was something so impressively vague, and yet so fearfully suggestive about this answer that Davie, quite overawed by it, retired from the discussion.

‘Does it ever seem to you as if you were all gone?’ demanded Effie speculatively, on another occasion.

This enquiry was so dark a one that, before reply-

ing to it at all, Davie was obliged to request an explanation.

‘I don’t know what you mean,’ said Davie.

‘Does it ever seem to you,’ said Effie, ‘as if you had been left somewhere?—the old *you*, you know.’

‘Oh—yes!’ exclaimed Davie, seeing some sort of light now; and then began to hesitate. ‘I don’t know—I can’t quite understand it,’ said Davie.

‘*I* can’t understand it at all,’ cried Effie eagerly. ‘And I think it must be worse still for you. I think if I were you I should feel as if I were dead.’

‘Oh no, it isn’t like being dead,’ said Davie. ‘It’s only different, somehow. I think presently I shall forget all about—all about—the other,—what used to be, I mean. I don’t think I mind it much,’ said Davie after a moment, and began to move his little thin hands one over the other, rather nervously. Perhaps something like a knot had come into his throat with the last words.

‘I know *I* should mind,’ said Effie. ‘I think,’ said Effie impetuously, with the blood flushing suddenly to her face—‘I think if it was me I should die!’

If it had been Effie she would not have borne it all as Davie bore it—that was very certain. I have no words to tell you how gentle and patient this little fellow was. He had so much pain to bear, and he bore it so bravely, with only now and then at the very worst a single cry to his mother, or a stretching out of his poor arms to her. He was so ready, too, to make the best of everything. You cannot think how cheerful and happy he often used to be for days together, so content with every little thing that was done for him, so ready to take an interest in everything that went on about him. Perhaps he looked wistfully sometimes at Harry with his strong firm limbs, or watched Effie a little sadly as she skipped lightly about the room; but if he longed to be like them again he would never or almost never say so, and the little face, even when it was saddest, would brighten again in a moment at a kind word or a smile.

It was all this, I suppose, that used to puzzle Effie, and give her that vague feeling that Davie was different from what he used to be. She thought that he was

different, and bewildered herself for a good while over that before she thought anything else about him ; it was only very slowly and after a good many days that she began at last to look with something more than mere surprise at his patient gentleness and sweetness. But in time these did come to touch her with something more than surprise. That heart of Effie's, I think, was like a little bit of barren ground that no kind hand had ever cultivated, and that no soft sunshine or sweet rain had ever reached. It was not too late yet, perhaps, to plough and sow it ; one or two hands, indeed, had tried already and failed ; but possibly it had been left for this little feeble hand of Davie's to do what the others, which had seemed stronger and more able, had found a hopeless task.

There was no doubt that Davie found it pleasant to have her with him. So clever and amusing as she was, so ready in finding out new things to do, so quick and bright in all her ways, a better companion to keep him from being dull he could not well have had. It is true that she got too much for him sometimes, and that Mrs. Leighton was not seldom obliged to send her away

lest she should entirely wear out the little lad's feeble strength ; but even if she had tired him out to-day he never failed to want her back to-morrow, and before more than a very short time had passed he would lie in the mornings and count the minutes till she came, and would brighten up at sight of her as at a gleam of sunshine.

And, indeed, I do not wonder that it was so, for Effie certainly devoted herself to him. There was nothing in the world that Effie liked better than to be wanted and admired and looked up to. It made her so amiable that it was quite delightful to be with her, and the more Davie appeared to enjoy her society the more did she exert herself to please him. You cannot think how many different things she used to do for him. She invented games, and drew pictures, and told stories, and sang songs. It is true that she allowed amazingly little interference from Davie while she was engaged in amusing him, and insisted in the most dictatorial fashion on his being amused according to *her* will, and not according to his own ; but then, when he was so languid and feeble, I don't know that this was by any means a bad

plan, for it kept him from being fanciful (as invalids sometimes become, when the choice of what they will do is left in their own hands), and altogether saved him a great deal of trouble. He very soon got entirely into the way of leaving the management of things to Effie, while she on her part took his submission and obedience quite as a matter of course, and hardly so much, I believe, as *knew* that she was lording it over him.

She did not know that ; nor did she know that he was gaining any influence over her ; and yet he was. One day when she was playing in Davie's room, she threw down a china cup and broke it.

'I'll say it was Munc,' remarked Effie, quite readily and coolly, as soon as she had done it.

'Oh Effie, don't do that !' cried Davie, in a tone of distress.

'Don't do what ?' asked Effie with a sneer, and looked at Davie as if she thought he was a fool.

And then, just at that moment, Mrs. Leighton opened the door. Quick as thought Effie threw a handkerchief over the broken pieces of china, and presently conveyed

them dexterously away to another and more retired part of the room ; and after that nearly all the rest of the day passed without the breakage being discovered. But in the evening, just as Effie was going to take her departure for the night, Mrs. Leighton happened to want something on this distant table where Effie had taken and propped up the fragments, and, making a slight movement, the table tilted a little, and down the pieces fell.

‘ Oh,’ cried the mother hastily, ‘ who has broken my cup ?’ And she turned round to where Effie was sitting, and looked at her.

But Effie’s head was bent down, and she said never a word.

‘ Effie, do you know anything about this ?’ the mother said again, coming towards her with the pieces in her hand.

And then Effie was obliged to look up. But instead of saying ‘ Munc did it,’ as she had announced that she would do, she coloured, and the words stuck in her throat. Not that, left to herself, she would have minded telling a lie in the very least—indeed she *wanted* to tell one ; only Davie was looking at her, and some-

how, in the presence of that little white face, with its pathetic eyes, the lie hung fire and would not come.

She hesitated for a moment or two, and then said half inaudibly—

‘It fell down.’

‘And who put it away here?’ Mrs. Leighton asked. ‘Did you, Effie? My dear, when you break a thing never try to stick it up again as if it was *not* broken ; that is so foolish. You should not have touched the cup at all, you know, but since you did touch it and let it fall, you ought to have told me. That is always the most honest thing to do, Effie ; and, besides being the *right* thing to do, you will always find, too, that it is the best for yourself.’

The mother, as she spoke these last words, put her hand on Effie’s shoulder, and Effie, though she did not look up, flushed hotly all over her face. She almost wished that she had said, ‘Munc did it ;’ and yet in the bottom of her heart, I think, she only *half* wished that she had said so ; she did not wholly wish it.

There were other days, too, after this one, when Effie found it hard to tell a lie in Davie’s sight. It was not

that she was afraid of Davie, in the sense in which she might have been afraid of other people,—of her uncle or her aunt for instance ; but yet somehow she became shy of doing it. She had always hitherto had a sort of general belief that telling lies was wrong—at least she knew it would be wrong and unwise and very much to be avoided if she were going to die, or if God were likely to think much about it, only at most times she comforted herself with the hope that God had too many other things to do to think much about it, and that perhaps He did not notice her much at all ; but here, in Davie's room, I think she came to have a sort of feeling and fear that she was nearer to God than when she was alone. She was nearer to God, and to all the unseen world. He was likely to know more about her here, and to make the angels set a sharper watch over her—in the same way as they did at church, where people never told lies, of course. Perhaps she argued like this ; perhaps, without arguing at all, she felt that there was something in being near to Davie, and in the sight of the pale young face that seemed to have so little of earth left in it, that made her *ashamed* to tell a lie. However that might be, the fact was that she

told fewer untruths during these days that she spent in Davie's room than she had told on any days since she first entered her uncle's house.

And she was very happy too as she sat by Davie's sick-bed. You might have thought that, being, as you know she was, such a wild, mischief-loving little monkey, she would have found it dull to spend hour after hour in that quiet room ; but not she ! She was as bright and cheery as a lark, and as for growing tired of being in the room, why, the only trouble was to get her out of it. If she had been left to do as she liked she would have stayed in it the whole day long. Whenever her aunt said to her, ' Effie, my dear, go away now for a little while ; ' or nurse came in, and said, ' Miss Effie, come away, and put on your things for a walk, ' Effie's lip would begin to pout, and I suspect that upon more than one occasion nurse, when she took her out, had not a pleasant time of it.

' It's just horrid to go, ' she exclaimed one day to Davie, ' and I wish walks were dead ! '

Upon which Davie gave a gentle little sigh, and, after a moment—

‘I don’t know,’ said Davie. ‘I think *I* should like to be able to walk again very much.’

And then Effie made no reply, but went away very quietly. Perhaps, as Davie spoke, she had felt ashamed at being so impatient, and had remembered what it would be if she were like him and *couldn’t* walk.

At times, indeed, the thought of what it would be to be helpless like Davie would flash suddenly across Effie’s mind with an indescribable feeling of fear and pain. As I have said already, I can hardly tell you how at moments she pitied him; it was with a passionate pity, such as never comes into the heart of some children at all. She was so sorry for him that sometimes she would burst out crying when she was sitting with him, and would exclaim that she did not know how he could bear it, and that, if it was her, she *wouldn’t* bear it, and the wild foolish little thing would bury her face in the bed clothes, and sob there in a way that used perfectly to frighten David.

For simple little Davie never dreamt of any such thing as being impatient or rebellious, or angry with God (as Effie was) because this sad thing had come

to him. He did not believe a bit the less, because he was ill, than he had believed all his innocent life that God loved him, and would take care of him. He could not *help* believing that—let what would happen to him; to him God's love was as certain as his father's or his mother's love; he never thought it possible that it could fail him. But Effie, with her wild rebellious heart, had no belief in God and his goodness such as Davie had; she, on her part, did not love God; she was only afraid of Him. He was powerful, and He had made Davie ill; but she was angry because He was powerful, and because she knew she could not fight against Him.

'I don't know how you can go on saying your prayers. *I* wouldn't say any prayers, if I were you,' she said one day to Davie, with her heart beating fast, it is true, and almost in a whisper, but yet defiantly too.

Upon this poor little Davie looked at her perfectly scared.

'Not say my prayers!' he echoed, almost thinking that Effie was going out of her mind.

‘No,’ she exclaimed; ‘what’s the good? when God doesn’t care.’

‘Doesn’t care for *what*?’ asked Davie in an awestruck tone.

‘For what you say,’ said Effie. ‘He doesn’t, I’m sure, or He wouldn’t keep you here.’

‘Oh—but—’ began Davie hurriedly, and then stopped abruptly, looking at her with startled wide-opened eyes, and did not know how to go on with his answer, and so said nothing, but was rather miserable for a little while; till presently his mother came in, and he put his arms about her neck, and told his trouble to her, and she comforted him.

And then, later in the same day, Mrs. Leighton came to Effie, and took the child’s hand, and said to her quietly—

‘My dear, have you been thinking to yourself that God does not love Davie because He lets him be ill? If you have, never while you live think that again. There are two certain things, Effie: one that God loves us; the other that He will do right. Don’t try to understand everything. There are ten thousand

things in the world that you will *never* be able to understand. Only trust God. If somebody you loved, my dear, were leading you along a road, even though it was all dark, so that you could not see your way, would you not feel you were safe if you held his hand?’

It was in the evening that Mrs. Leighton said this, by Davie’s fireside. For a moment, as her aunt began to speak, Effie had glanced sharply up into her face. So Davie had been telling upon her! she said to herself; and then her first angry thought had been that she would never say anything to Davie again. But yet, before her aunt’s few words were ended, this first thought had given place to something else. There was something in that simple figure of holding a hand in the dark that appealed vividly to Effie’s imagination. She did not, as you may suppose, answer Mrs. Leighton’s question, but as soon as her aunt had turned away from her she began to think.

She wondered if people ever felt as if they had hold of God’s hand, and as if He were leading them through the dark! She shuddered a little, for at

first it seemed a dreadful thought,—but yet—! Suppose, when she was afraid in the night—when she lay awake thinking of horrible things—suppose then she could feel as if she held God's hand! If she tried to feel it, would He really come near her, she wondered, and keep her safe?

She turned to where Davie was lying with open eyes, so calm and quiet and happy looking. She wondered if *he* had ever thought of—this thing that her aunt had said. It was a strange thought to Effie—half terrible, half comforting. She felt frightened at the idea that she could ever be so near to God, and yet if she *could* be so near to Him, she felt as if she must be safe. She should have to die some day—she knew that, though it was always a terror to her to think of it; but suppose she could die feeling as if she had hold of God's hand!

'Mother,' said Davie, lying in his bed, 'it seems such a long long time since I began to be ill! I wonder if it seems half as long to anybody else!' The little lip quivered for a moment as he said that. But yet, a second or two afterwards,—'I don't mean

that I haven't been happy,' he said,—‘only it does seem so long, mother.’

Mrs. Leighton was sitting by the bedside, and she did not answer Davie, but Effie, looking round, saw her suddenly put her face down upon the pillow. Do you think the time had seemed long only to Davie? Effie hardly knew why it was, but the tears came into her eyes. For the first time since she had come into the house she almost felt for a moment as if she should like to go and put her arms round her aunt's neck. The child sat looking towards the bed with her heart beating fast—with a strange kind of longing. Presently, too, when the mother lifted up her head again, and began to talk to her little lad, as she did, quite cheerfully, and the two, after a few minutes, became happy and almost merry together, a curious feeling, half of loneliness half of jealousy, came over Effie. She sat there, and nobody seemed to want her or think of her. ‘I don't care!’ said Effie to herself; but she did care. Perhaps—who can tell?—she might have been begin-

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ning at this moment to think that it would be a happy thing to be loved as her aunt loved Davie.

Many a time Effie used to sit in Davie's room, and wonder at him when he talked so freely and happily as he did to his mother. It seemed something quite strange and unnatural to Effie—as if she had seen a mouse putting himself on an equality with a lion. Innocent little Davie used to tell everything to his mother that ever came into his mind, and would talk of things that he and the other children had done together, till Effie would have given anything if she could have trodden on his toes to keep him quiet. *She* never would have dreamt of telling any of their pranks to a grown-up person, but Davie poured out everything, and the strangest part of the matter was, that Mrs. Leighton seemed to be quite amused by hearing him. Now and then, it is true, she did certainly look a little grave, and once or twice she would say—‘You should not have done that, my boy ;’ but for the greater part you would have thought she found it as pleasant to hear about their games as they had found it to play them, for she would listen to Davie as he

talked about them for the hour together, and would seem so to enter into the spirit of their fun that once or twice Effie herself forgot that she was a grown-up person, and therefore the natural enemy of all fun and frolic, and began to gabble away to her in the excitement of the moment almost as fast as Davie. It is true, that after any little bit of thawing of this kind, she always froze again very rapidly, and was greatly astonished at herself for what she had done ; but still every day made it seem a little less strange that she should have talked pleasantly to her aunt, and every day made it seem a little more easy to do it again.

And, indeed, for my own part, I think it was no wonder that Effie began sometimes to be happy with Mrs. Leighton, for I can hardly tell you how kind and good and gentle her aunt was. It was a beautiful thing to see her in Davie's sick-room, and to see how the little lad clung to her. She was a fair, grave, delicate woman, with a sweet face that had a way at times of looking quite beautiful. Effie had never thought it beautiful before Davie's

illness, but she did now. When her aunt was bending over Davie, or singing, or talking to him, somehow it used to make her think of heaven and the angels.

She liked to hear her aunt sing by the firelight. She liked to hear her tell stories too, and she often told stories ; and, to my taste, I must say that I think they were nicer stories than Effie's own, by a good deal. There were not, indeed, nearly such astonishing things in them, nor were they often (though they were sometimes) about fairies, and knights, and princesses ; but they were often about boys and girls like themselves, and often about great men and noble women, and about heroic things that had been done and suffered ; and Effie, as she listened to them, would sometimes feel her lip trembling, and her heart beating fast with eagerness and interest, and sometimes strange new feelings would come into her of love, and admiration and sympathy—till more than once the tears were on her cheeks, and she would sit, thrilling all over, with her lips apart, and her colour raised, and her eyes fixed on Mrs. Leighton's

face. There was a kind of eager wonder in her as she listened : it seemed to her like some wholly new thing to hear that people had ever lived who were so noble and great-hearted and tender and brave as these men and women were whom her aunt told Davie about.

‘Only I don’t suppose there are any of them now. I suppose they only used to be long ago—don’t you think?’ she said to Davie once, in a speculative way.

Upon which Davie stared, and—

‘Why shouldn’t they be now as well as at any other time?’ asked Davie, not in the least seeing any difficulty in the case. For to him the stories were merely beautiful stories, but not impossible ones by any means. It seemed no strange thing to Davie with his pure simple tender heart that people should be good, and brave, and noble, and should give up their lives for one another.

‘Why shouldn’t they be now just as well as at any other time?’ said Davie, looking into Effie’s face with his clear surprised eyes.

CHAPTER X.

IT was autumn, you know, when Davie began to be ill. One after another the weeks stole on, and when Christmas came Meg was still away, and Davie was still lying in his bed, with the white face as white as ever, and growing slowly (though Effie did not notice it) paler and smaller.

Sometimes, in great illnesses, patients seem to do so well for a little while, and then suddenly, without any cause that can be seen—nobody knows how or why—a change comes, and there is no more advance—no more growing stronger or better; they go up the hill no longer, but begin slowly—slowly to slip back. December was just beginning when a change like this came to Davie. It came quietly,

without any warning; nobody knew the hour when it began. He had been doing well, and getting stronger, though very gradually—till suddenly the stop came, and the little feet began to slip back.

He had been so much better that on several days they had partly dressed him, and carried him from his bed to a sofa in the room; but all at once—though he did not complain of anything—he began to shrink from rising, as if the movement hurt him, or as if he was too weak to bear it.

‘I like to be in bed best, mother; it is very nice to be back in bed,’ he said one evening when his mother was laying him down.

‘You shall stay in bed if you like it, my darling,’ his mother answered, with a little break in her voice. And then after that he did not get up any more.

It was natural enough that Effie should not think much of Davie’s not growing any stronger. Children don’t notice such things very much. She soon became so accustomed to have Davie ill, that it seemed to her a matter of course that day after day and week after week should pass without making him better.

She did not even notice presently that he slowly fell out of the way of being able to do things that he had done at first. One day when they were going to raise him for a little while on pillows, as they had often done, he turned faint with pain, and they had to lay him down; and after that day Effie never saw him sitting up again. But she did not think much of that.

‘Dont you like to sit up now?’ she merely asked him once; and when he answered in his gentle way—

‘No, it hurts me—rather: I like lying down best,’ she never thought again about the matter.

When his appetite grew more and more feeble, too, and day after day the little delicacies that were made for him were put aside almost untasted, Effie used merely to look on amazed that anybody should be so dainty, and, if it had not been that she profited by his inability to consume them, she would have been inclined to blame Davie pretty severely for thinking so lightly of his blessings. She did not think it was a thing of very much consequence that he did not care to eat: she never perceived

the silent pain with which the mother would often move away the untouched plate.

Nor did she notice that it seemed a harder thing than it had done at first for the mother to wear a cheerful face, and talk lightly or merrily to her boy; she only knew that sometimes, when she and Davie might be playing together, her aunt would come and stop their game, seldom saying more than merely—‘Davie is getting tired, my dear;’ or ‘Go now and play alone for a little while;’ and at such times Effie would be angry, and would go away sulkily, thinking that her aunt only interrupted them because she wanted to spoil their fun, and never seeing—as she might have seen, if she had looked or thought about it—how weary and weak the white face was looking, or noticing how thin and faint the little lad’s voice had become.

Day after day that face of his got so very very gradually thinner and whiter that she never saw the slow change coming over it; and the childish voice had been a tiny voice even to begin with. If she could have seen the mother’s face sometimes when, as Davie lay asleep,

she sat looking at her boy, *that* would have taught her something perhaps ; but at these moments she did not see it.

Meg had been expected home before Christmas, but her godmother wished her to stay longer, and so she stayed, and they spent their Christmas-day at home without her. It was the first Christmas that Effie had spent in England. She had looked forward to it a good deal before it came ; and through all the rest of her life she remembered it after it had passed away.

It was a mild winter's day—not at all the kind of day that people imagine to themselves as proper for Christmas, with crisp frost in the air and snow upon the ground. It was mild, almost like spring, with a west wind blowing, and the sun shining out of a blue misty sky—such a curious Christmas-day that Effie was quite taken aback by it, and almost thought that something had gone wrong with the almanac and that it could not be the 25th of December at all.

Although it was quite wrong of it to be so mild, however, the children soon forgot to find fault with it on that account, and prepared themselves to be very happy.

Harry and Effie went to church with Mr. Leighton in the morning ; then they came home to turkey and plum-pudding (such a glorious plum-pudding, brought into the dining-room all encircled with blue fire, in a way that almost frightened Effie) ; then till dusk Harry and she were out-of-doors together ; and then they all gathered in Davie's room and had tea there, with the little lad lying in the midst of them.

It was such a bright, cheerful, even merry, evening. I think Davie was very happy as he lay with the people all around him whom he loved best in the world. He did not speak much, but the patient little face looked so calm and glad and beautiful. They seated themselves around his bed, and the father read aloud from some pleasant books to them—a bit of Shakespeare, and the 'Pied Piper of Hamelin,' and Charles Lamb's funny story about roast pig, over which Harry roared ; and then they played a game at forfeits, and then the father told them stories—sometimes gay things and sometimes grave things, just as they came into his head : and little Davie lay with his gentle face looking up at him and his hand clasped

in his mother's. All the evening Mrs. Leighton sat beside her boy, holding his hand. Effie and Harry, no doubt, were too full of their own enjoyment to notice how very quiet she was, or to guess for a moment that it needed an effort on the father's part to seem so happy and gay. They sat laughing at his stories, and making fun between themselves, and never for a moment thinking of all the sorrow that might be hidden from them, or the sickness of heart that they could not see.

They laughed and jested (even Effie did, almost forgetting her usual bashfulness before grown-up people) till the evening was all but ended ; and then, when at last the servants had been called upstairs, and they were all kneeling down together at evening prayers—all at once as he tried to read one prayer the father's voice broke down, and with a great sob he burst into tears. It was a prayer about meeting all together again when another Christmas-day came back.

There was such a strange dreadful silence (it seemed dreadful at least to Effie) for a few moments, and

then the mother rose softly from her knees, and took the book out of her husband's hands, and kneeling down again at his side read the rest of the prayers in a steady voice.

In a minute or two more everybody had risen up, and the mother said quietly—'Now, dears, it is time to go to bed,' and she kissed Harry and Effie as they came up to her, and sent them away.

They had been so merry, but they both went out of the room with a strange, startled, awe-struck feeling. They did not speak to one another as they crossed the passage, and went upstairs to their own rooms. 'Good-night,' Harry merely said half aloud when he reached his own door, and Effie answered 'Good-night,' and nothing more. In her heart she was longing to ask Harry something, but yet she had not courage to do it. She was longing to ask, 'Why did he begin to cry?'—but she did not dare.

She went into her own room, and began to undress herself. She had a curious miserable feeling as she stood there alone. It was almost as if she knew why her uncle had cried, and yet the knowledge was so dreadful

to her that she would not believe it—she tried to escape from it—it came to her like such a great misery and horror that she felt as if she could not bear it. She undressed herself quickly, and got into bed, and burst out sobbing. What should she do,—what should she do, she cried to herself, if Davie died?

She used to leave her candle burning, and some one—either nurse, or one of the other servants, or her aunt—always came up after she was in bed, and took it away. To-night it was her aunt who came. She had been in bed for a quarter of an hour when Mrs. Leighton came into the room, and, as she usually did, went up to the bed to see that the clothes were comfortably tucked in.

‘Are you all right, my dear?’ she said, and she would just have asked this question and have gone away if it had not happened that Effie’s voice gave a curiously stifled answer.

‘Ye—es,’ said Effie in a half-choked voice, not showing her face, but letting the husky word come through the bedclothes; and then Mrs. Leighton paused, and after a moment put her hand on the child’s head, and—

‘Effie, my dear, what are you doing?’ she said gently. For she was not sure at first that Effie was really crying: she was only certain of that when after a moment or two more she heard a great distinct sob. Upon that she turned Effie’s face resolutely round—a sad little face all stained with tears, and with swollen eyes that blinked at the candle-light.

I don’t know if she guessed at once what the tears meant—perhaps she did not, till Effie in broken words as she questioned her began to blurt out her grief. A passionate, unreasonable, selfish grief it was.

‘I—I’m afraid that—that Davie’s going—to die!’ she sobbed, choking over the words, and trembling, and crying—and never remembering that to this poor mother who was bending over her the thought of Davie’s death must be an agony greater than hers ten thousand times. She thought only of herself,—of what she should do if Davie were gone, of what the house would be without him—and it seemed more dreadful than she could bear.

Mrs. Leighton put her arms about her, and lifted her up a little from the pillow, and laid her head upon her

breast. Effie's sorrow was selfish enough, but do you wonder if at this moment her aunt loved her better than she had ever loved her yet? She put her lips to the little quivering lips and kissed them; her own tears began to fall over the child's face. Perhaps it was a relief after the long weary day to shed those sorrowful tears—to give way for a few moments and weep with somebody who was weeping for her little lad.

Frightened and miserable as Effie had been she had had a hope till now that the thing she feared was too dreadful to be true, and that, when she told it to her aunt, her aunt would smile at her terror, and tell her that nobody was afraid that Davie was going to die. But now her aunt heard her and said no single word to calm and comfort her. 'God will spare him perhaps: pray to God for him, my dear,' was all she said in a broken voice.

If she could but have dared to ask her some questions!—if she could but have heard something more!—but her aunt said nothing. With a feeling of terrified wretchedness the child clung to her, for the first time that she had ever done so,—clasping her arms about her neck, and

sobbing on her bosom with wild unrestrained grief. 'I thought he was getting better. Isn't he—isn't he getting better?' she asked once, with her great beseeching eyes all swimming in tears.

And then after a moment's silence the mother said softly—'No.' 'No, my dear, he is not getting better,' she said.

She tried very tenderly to hush and soothe the poor little thing, but it was not an easy business. On the rare occasions when Effie gave way to great sorrow her grief was accustomed to show itself in a perfect tempest of sobs and tears. When she had parted from her black nurse in India she had cried in this way, and she cried in this way now for Davie. For a long time Mrs. Leighton could not leave her. For nearly an hour she sat beside her bed, before at last the poor swollen eyes closed, and the child from very exhaustion fell asleep.

'We were not just to her when we thought she had no heart,' the mother said to her husband when she joined him at the end of this long hour, and her own eyes then had red marks round them too.

'Poor Effie!—poor little thing!' she said tenderly to herself more than once during the night that followed, as

she thought of the child's bitter grief, and more than once she left her watch by Davie's side, and softly stole upstairs to Effie's room to make sure that the wearied little one was sleeping.

CHAPTER XI.

IT seemed to Effie in the morning when she awoke as if she had had some dreadful dream. Sometimes before now she had dreamt that Davie was dying or dead, and no words can tell what a relief it had been when the glad morning came. But now the morning came, and there was *no* relief. She opened her eyes, not to throw off her fear, but to learn for the first time what it was to bear the pain of a great sorrow.

It was holiday-time, you know, so that Harry had no school to go to, and for the last two or three days—since breaking-up day—he and Effie had both of them been a great deal in Davie's room. But to-day Effie felt as if she had no courage to go again to Davie's room—as though she should never be able to

sit with him any more. She ate her breakfast almost without speaking a syllable, and as soon as it was over she crept away, and took herself and her heavy heart up to the play-room, and curled herself into one of the window-seats there, and burst out crying again. I cannot tell you how utterly desolate and miserable the child felt. Until yesterday she had scarcely ever thought of how much she cared for Davie, but now she felt as if she cared for nothing else but him in all the world, and that if he were to die it would not be possible to bear it. She sat rocking herself from side to side, choking with sobs and tears. It seemed to her foolish little heart as if nobody in the house could love Davie half as well as she loved him—or else would they not all be sitting crying for him, as she was doing, instead of going about and talking and looking as if nothing was the matter? *She* was the one who loved him best, she thought, and there was nobody who felt for her or knew how wretched she was.

It was late in the afternoon before she ventured to go into his room. ‘Effie has had a little upset,’ the mother had said to her boy when in the morning he had

asked for her. 'She will come in presently, but don't take any notice.' So, when Effie stole in, silent and shy, in the dusk, Davie, though he saw her swollen eyes, made no remark either about them or about her having stayed so long away, and only tried to show by being very kind to her how sorry he was that she had been in trouble. The little fellow thought that she had got into some scrape, as had happened on more than one occasion before now, and the mother could not undeceive him. So he was very kind and gentle to Effie as the poor child sat beside him with her heart aching and trembling.

'You must not cry, my dear, while you are with Davie,' her aunt had said to her before she came. 'I can only let you stay with him if you keep from crying and try to be cheerful.'

But Effie could not keep from crying. She sat down by the bedside, and she had not sat there for ten minutes before the tears began to swell in her eyes. It was quite in vain that Davie tried to make her play, and that Mrs. Leighton talked pleasantly to her: the great drops grew bigger and bigger till they fell at

last, and before the end of half an hour, with sobs beginning to come thick and fast, her aunt was obliged to take her by the hand and lead her away.

‘My poor little one, you must try to learn more self-restraint. If we were all to break down like this how do you think we could do anything at all for Davie?’ the mother merely said in her grave kind voice before, in the passage outside Davie’s room, she let the child’s hand go.

And then Effie went away sobbing,—thinking in her passionate blind way that it was easy for other people to speak who did not feel as she did. There was nobody who felt as miserable as she did, she thought,—nobody who loved Davie half so well. She crept up to her own little room, and shut herself in there, and lay on the bed crying in the cold and dark, until after a long time had passed her aunt came up to look for her, and comfort her ; and the kind, brave, gentle, tender-hearted woman talked to this poor little unrestrained ungoverned child till at least *some* of the good and wise words she spoke sank into Effie’s heart and stayed there.

I think that I should spoil those wise true words if I were to try to write them down. They were spoken with her arm about the child's neck, and with the poor little sorrowful head pressed on her bosom. They were noble words about forgetting ourselves for the sake of other people, and hiding our own griefs that we may keep other people glad. They tried to teach Effie a lesson that she had never been taught yet—that no pure love is ever selfish, and no wild indulgence in grief ever beautiful or right. The mother spoke them gravely and calmly, but at the end of them she clasped the poor little child in her arms, and kissed her almost passionately. 'Do you think I shall ever forget how happy you have often made my boy, Effie?' she said. 'I shall *never* forget it, my dear!—only I want you to make him happy still—I want you to go on helping me.'

It was a difficult lesson for Effie to learn—a difficult task for her to try to perform. It would have been hard for any child, but it was hardest of all for a child like her, who had never known what it was to check

any emotion, whether good or bad, whether grief or passion, or anger or affection, from the beginning of her life till now. It was *very* hard for her; but yet, through all her faults (and you know how many they were) Effie had one virtue at least—she had the power of loving; and that made almost everything possible for her. It made even self-restraint possible for her, and self-forgetfulness. ‘Do this for Davie’s sake,’ her aunt had said; and the child presently tried to do it.

It would take too much time to describe to you fully the way in which, day after day, she tried to make herself fit to be Davie’s companion again through the last few sad and sweet and solemn weeks during which the little fragile life was gently fading away. She found it almost too hard a thing for her to do at first; in her great startled grief she was so frightened and bewildered, that for the first few days it seemed almost a hopeless thing. She could not keep those foolish tears of hers away; all her merriment was gone; she grieved and puzzled Davie by her melancholy little face; she was so depressing an object in

his room that Mrs. Leighton could scarcely let her stay in it, but was obliged to find reasons a dozen times a day for sending her away, that Davie might be relieved from the sight of her. But if she sent her away a dozen times, a dozen times would Effie come back again, and silently steal into some corner from which she could see Davie's face.

All this, however, was only for the first few days; something better than this came afterwards. It was so cheerful, so peaceful, even so beautiful in this sick-room of Davie's that gradually Effie's wild grief became soothed and comforted. As day passed after day, and no change that she could see came, it began, too, to seem so impossible that Davie could be going to die. That first great fear of hers began to lose its keenness, and to fade farther and farther away. How could he be going to die soon when he was lying there so happy—suffering so little? Effie had always thought of death as of some dreadful thing that came with sharp pain and terror and misery; but there was no pain here—no fear—no sorrow. How could he be going to die?

Effie had thought in the first moments of her grief that she could never forget it again, and that she could never be happy with Davie any more ; but she learnt presently—what in the course of our lives most of us learn—that it is possible to spend hours by dying beds that we shall look back upon hereafter as amongst the best and sweetest hours we ever knew. Effie never got back into her old wild spirits in Davie's room, but many dear and well-remembered days did she spend in it presently during these first weeks of the New Year, when the snow outside was lying on the ground. Meg came home during these weeks, and Meg and Harry, for it was holiday-time, were often out upon the ice in the bright frosty sunshine ; but it was very seldom that anybody could persuade Effie either to go with them there, or to join them in their games at home. The child seemed to have only one wish—to be where Davie was. 'Effie, my dear, go with the others ; I should like you to go with them,' the mother would sometimes say to her ; but it was hard to resist the little appealing face that as she spoke would turn to her with its mute peti-

tion to stay. Let her remain in Davie's room, and she was content; she never asked for anything nor seemed to want anything but that.

And, if it made her happy to be with Davie, her being with him made Davie happy too. It might have been that, if things had been the other way, Davie would not have loved Effie and grieved for her as passionately as she was loving and grieving now for him; I do not think he would, for Davie's was a gentle and clinging nature, and not a passionate one, as Effie's was; but at least the little lad loved her, and was happier to be with her than to be with either Meg or Harry, or with anybody except the two who were dearest to him of all. He was never tired of Effie for a play-fellow—he was hardly ever tired of listening to her stories. She began to tell him stories again after a time, and I think they were often sweeter stories now than they had formerly been. They were not so lively, indeed, but Davie did not care about that now; he was beginning to like those things best that were very quiet; and they were less wonderful too but they were gentler and kinder and

better than the old ones. Something had happened to Effie during these days that had put other thoughts into her head than thoughts about captive princesses and fairies.

She would sit in the peaceful room, spinning out her long childish tales, carrying them on, in the old way, day after day—for so many many days, as it seemed to her afterwards; and Davie would lie listening, liking the stories, but yet gradually asking fewer and fewer questions about them, as the little last grains of strength wasted slowly away. He would laugh sometimes still when Effie said a funny thing, but when Effie's tales were sad he would never cry,—not even when, now and then, at some very pathetic part, Effie would almost cry herself. I think the little lad was done with tears now. He had had a tender heart, and had wept for many things during his short life, but all that was past away, and the world was growing to him so like a dream, and heaven was so near him, that pain and sorrow seemed like things that could not touch him any more.

It was a new life to Effie during these last weeks that Davie lived—the highest, purest, best life that she had ever known. Do you think that she herself had ever been so near to heaven as she was now, when for the first time she loved some other human creature with all her heart and soul? That love for Davie made a new creature of her; it was like God's rain falling on parched-up ground. Not that I want you to suppose that Effie, who had been always hitherto naughty and hard and mischievous, became all at once, as if by magic, gentle and good. I do not mean this at all; it is a long and difficult thing, and not the work of a few weeks by any means, to get what is naughty rooted out of us and what is good planted in its place; I only mean to tell you how for the first time in all her life her love for Davie made her forget herself—how it awoke a thousand new and better feelings in her, and, as rain would soften a spot of parched-up earth, softened the little hard and selfish heart, and made it possible for future good things to spring up in it.

Could she say or do what was wrong or wicked, do

you think, while that little pure face of Davie's was in her sight?—could she tell a lie before him, or do a mean or cowardly thing?—could she even say a sharp or angry word without feeling miserable as soon as she had spoken it? She lost temper once for a moment with him because he could not understand something she was trying to explain, and in her impatience indignantly called him a 'little fool,'—and you would have thought afterwards that she meant to break her heart with sorrow for it. She was such a passionate, uncontrolled child, you see, that she never knew how to do anything by halves. Harry and Meg loved Davie, and were as sorry for him as they could be, and Meg was always ready—only too ready—to cry about him, and if either of them could have made him well by giving up everything they had in the world they would have done it; but still Meg and Harry did not love their brother with one grain of the passion that Effie did. To her David had become the one thing in the world. 'Poor child!' the mother used to say sometimes softly to herself when she looked at her. These days were doing a great deal towards making her aunt and Effie love each other. Mrs.

Leighton would often lay her hand on Effie's head with a silent tenderness that the child half understood. One night when she bade her good-bye she took her in her arms and kissed her with a long close kiss. 'Effie, when we are left alone we must comfort one another,' she said.

She said this one February night ; and Mrs. Leighton knew then, though Effie did not know it, that the time when they should need to comfort one another was coming very near. To Effie it seemed as the days passed that each day was like another,—that there was no change as they went by—so peacefully, gently, almost happily. She did not know, and it was right she should not, how the father and mother were beginning to feel that they could almost count the time they could keep their boy by hours now.

'The violets were blooming in the sunshine, and Effie used to pick them, and bring them up to Davie's room. The little lad's face had brightened when he saw them first. His birthday was on one of these February days. 'He came with the first spring flowers,' his mother had been used to say tenderly long ago. On *this* birthday

she only looked in silence at the little purple flowers, with great tears in her eyes.

She used still to sit and sing to him for many an hour of these last days. He gradually left off caring very much about having stories told to him—they tired him, and he could not listen to them long, but to the very end he loved to hear his mother sing. And Effie loved to hear her too. ‘It’s better than being in church—ever so much. I think it’s like being in heaven,’ she said to Davie once. ‘I dare say the angels always sing like that.’ And, if she was wrong, at least the fancy did more good than harm to her. For pure and right and noble thoughts would often come into the child’s heart as she sat and listened to that soft sweet voice—vague thoughts of God, and of love, and of high and holy and happy things. You scarcely would have known the hard’ unloving little face of other days if you had sometimes seen it now when the light was in it. On the brightest days of all her former life I think it had never looked as it looked sometimes now.

Gently and calmly and beautifully little Davie’s life came to an end at last. He died on the evening of a

bright spring day—a day that had been all full of sunshine, with the wind so soft that for hours the window had stood wide open, and the perfume from the violet bank had come up into the room, and the birds' songs, and peaceful sounds of out-door work—the mowing of grass in the early morning, and the lowing of cows away in the meadow. It seemed to Effie like so many another day : but it was Davie's last day on earth.

He lay all the morning and afternoon quite quiet, —quite happy—without suffering at all. 'Davie is very weak to-day, we must not talk to him much,' the mother merely said to Effie once. For a long time Effie sat dressing her doll upon the bed—amusing herself so—spreading out the little gay doll's clothes all round her. Almost the whole day long the mother sat by the bedside holding her boy's hand.

She was so calm that she could still talk and smile and sing to him. Once she talked softly to him for a little while of heaven, and God's love, and of the courage with which we ought to bear all sorrow here, and all parting, with the thought of *that* at the end of life, 'when we shall be together again,' she said,—'all of us with God, and no

separation will come any more, my dear, for ever !' She laid her face down beside him when she said these last words, and the marks of the only tears that she shed all day were on her cheek when she raised it up again.

For the last time, in the evening, Effie heard her sing to him. She and his father were both sitting with him then. Harry and Meg had been in the room too, but they were gone. It was late in the evening, almost bedtime, and by the soft quiet firelight the mother sang to her boy his last hymn.

And then after that Effie knew nothing more. A little while after she had finished singing, her aunt said quietly to her, 'Kiss Davie now, my dear, and bid him good-night ;' and she went to the bedside and kissed him.

'Good-night,' she said. And the little dying voice answered 'Good-night.'

That kiss was her last good-bye to him—the silent seal set to the days that they had spent together. She did not know it. She went to bed, and fell asleep, thinking that she should awake again and find to-morrow like what to-day had been ; but she awoke instead to a new world.

Children, I have brought you only to the very beginning of Effie's better life, but yet I must leave her here. I do not want to make you sad by telling you how for a time she broke her heart for Davie ; and I should make my story far too long if I were to try to describe to you how the good seed that had been sown in her heart during these months of Davie's illness gradually sprang up and bore fruit. You have seen at least that there was hope for her—that that poor little heart of hers was not so stubborn and hard as it had seemed to be—that she was far from being altogether bad. She had touched heaven in loving Davie, and that love was not a lost thing even though Davie died. The little simple childish life had passed away, but the good that it had done so unconsciously lived after it—a pure and beautiful foundation for other hands to build upon. For, children, believe this ; all things are possible,—all goodness, sweetness, unselfishness, patience, self-denial,—if love is at the bottom of a human heart.

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